



Volume 23

Dominican Monastic Search



AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS
WHERE DIVINE FULLNESS
POURS FORTH

DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH



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Dominican Monastic Search is a spiritual and theological review written by the nuns. Its purpose is to foster the contemplative life by sharing of insights gained from prayer and study. It is published once a year as a service to the nuns of North America. It is also available to the wider Dominican Family and others upon request. A donation of \$10.00 to aid in the cost of printing would be appreciated, when possible, from non-members.

Dominican Monastic Search welcomes all its readers to contribute articles for publication. We ask that manuscripts be prepared with concern for literary and intellectual quality. Appropriate subjects include scripture, theology, philosophy, spirituality, Dominican Life and the liberal arts insofar as they contribute to our Dominican vocation. Serious poetry reflective of these categories may also be submitted, though only a small amount can be used. A theme for each issue is usually announced in advance, but is not intended to limit the scope of the articles. Before submitting a manuscript, please refer to the page of guidelines at the end of the most recent issue of *DMS*.


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FROM THE EDITOR

As we know, this year of 2006 marks the 800th anniversary of the founding of the first monastery of Dominican Nuns by St. Dominic, in Prouihle, France. He had begun his preaching mission with Diego, his bishop, in 1205, and by August of 1206, a building was begun for the eleven women who were the first happy fruits of hard work. The monastery was a modest one, completed by November 22nd, feast of St. Cecilia, when the nuns moved to this new home of theirs. Approbation by the Holy See was granted December 22nd and their enclosure was established, significantly, on the feast of the beloved apostle St. John, December 27th 1206.

Dominic loved these women. They had caught his fire, as he had caught Christ's. They were a sign of the Kingdom in the midst of a land torn apart by confusion, darkness and greed. These women were in earnest. They had sought in vain for the answer to the question "Why is there evil in the world?" Dominic led them to peace and joy and light where they in turn could become a light – could *become* a little kingdom – proclaiming to rich and poor alike that there is one God, one hope given by a Crucified Savior, true God and true Man, who did not disdain to enter our world and suffer with us our pain and struggle, and ultimately die for us.

Dominic experienced his sisters' presence at Prouihle as a *Seignadou* – a sign from God – a light of faith, hope and charity, a light that still burns. This light is now our joy, privilege and responsibility. Dominic yet loves his nuns, his sisters, and looks to them for their prayer and penance and preaching.

Dominican Monastic Search hopes to witness to this sacred trust and continue to share the fruits of living in "his garden, all broad, fragrant and joyous" (St Catherine). This issue, though not planned in the articles sent in, does providentially outline the major foundations of our vocation as Dominican nuns:

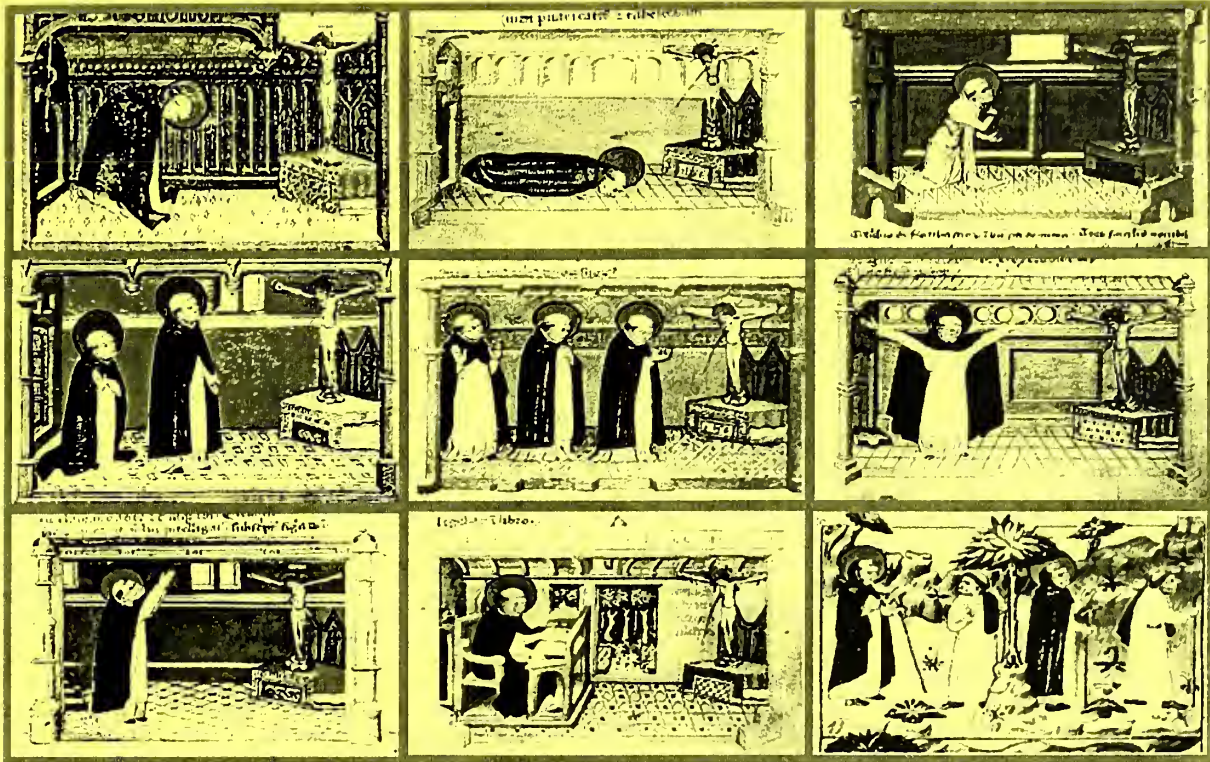
- ❖ Dominic's extraordinary spirit of prayer ever undergirded his "incredible yearning for the salvation of all."
- ❖ Dominic's desert spirit, that blossomed into wisdom, joy, courage and missionary zeal;
- ❖ Dominic's struggles that were the test and means to victory; he is a well-tried champion;
- ❖ Catherine of Siena, one of Dominic's greatest daughters; her growth, her many wonderful friendships that were truly a sign of the Kingdom in a time of great turmoil;
- ❖ Catherine and Agnes and their love and union in prayer and desires;
- ❖ Many faithful sisters, just like us – full of faith and courage;
- ❖ The Prayer of the Divine Office – Dominic's great passion and ours;
- ❖ Encouragement to "Listen to God's Word" as did Dominic and our sisters of old, to listen, to learn, so as to worship and proclaim the truth;
- ❖ Brilliant light of Mark and John; the unfathomable Gospel message, foundation of our faith and consecrated life;
- ❖ History of the International Commission of Nuns; the nuns number over two hundred monasteries across the world and seek to unite in common goals and concerns. *One mind and one heart in the Lord.*
- ❖ Poems which sing their own song of dedication to Christ, to Dominic and Jerusalem – city of peace.

I thank my co-editors for their great help and support. My thanks also to Sr. Susan Early and Sr. Dominic in completing the Index of all the articles of DMS from 1980 to 2006 (author and topic), and I thank each one who contributed to this 2006 issue. Please be encouraged to share your studies in *Dominican Monastic Search*, by articles, poetry, translations or book reviews, art work, drawings or calligraphy. If you have any suggestions for a theme, please let me know. Since our 800th commemoration and celebration will extend to 2007 we will hope for articles on *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare* and the spirit of joy which is so great a part of our Dominican vocation.

May our blessed father St. Dominic bless us and strengthen us to faithfully walk with him and all our sisters of these 800 grace-filled years!

Sincerely and gratefully in St. Dominic,

Sr. Mary Vincent, O.P.
Coordinating Editor
Farmington Hills, MI



ADORATION

St. Dominic's Humble Prayer

Sister Mary Regina, O.P.
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Before reading this short essay on the way St. Dominic prayed his humble prayer of adoration, we would do well to gaze for at least two or three minutes on this depiction of the "Nine Ways of St. Dominic's Prayer." Go from one frame to the next slowly to observe all you can, the similarities and differences, in each box. Notice the inclinations, genuflections, supplications, prostrations, contemplation, *lectio divina*, penance earnest intercession and praying on a journey. Notice that each depiction illustrates the use of the body. Then continue with the text.¹

Adoration in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas:

There is an excellent text on the prayer of adoration, written by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* that offers us clear insights into the dynamic prayer of St. Dominic. The postures he took in his night vigils particularly, demonstrate the clear working of God in the many forms in which he adored the Lord. St. Thomas teaches that adoration or reverence is due according to the degree of the dignity of the one whom we honor. When homage is due the king and when homage is due God, the two levels of reverence are quite different. Strictly speaking we adore only God (*latría*). Since God is of the very highest excellence, He deserves the greatest adoration.² We reverence or pay tribute to creatures (*dulia*) only out of respect for their dignity.

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Notice that with both God and persons we pay respect by an external act, for adoration and respect are acknowledged as external virtues. There is proportion and distinction here, since God is to be honored above all his creation. These external acts give evidence of our interior disposition, and thus become prayer when directed to God. Furthermore, the use of the body is most proper to adoration and an absolute necessity for this form of prayer. St. Thomas explains this well: "Since we are composed of a twofold nature, intellectual and sensible, we offer God a twofold adoration; namely, a spiritual adoration, consisting in the internal devotion of the mind; and a bodily adoration, which consists in an external humbling of the body."³ Notice that Thomas uses the word "humble" with regard to adoration of God. A deep humility is extremely necessary.

The Prayer of St. Dominic:

Let us pause a moment here to gaze once again at the depiction of The Nine Ways of St. Dominic's Prayer to observe our father and founder in the context of adoration. The English Dominican and former Master of the Order, Bede Jarrett, O.P., writes of Dominic as he ponders the saint's prayer: "He must first be ablaze himself. Nor can he allow himself the sole enjoyment of his fire; he may not shield a guarded flame."⁴ The stage is set. We now look at Dominic's prayer of adoration to make it our own, and to allow ourselves to be filled with the blazing fire of devotion. However, making Dominic's prayer ours, we must take a magnifying glass to his, which had such great impact on others and on history, particularly the history of religion.

We might ask, what is this fire, this adoration? The prayer of adoration Dominic offered day and night, particularly at his night vigils, was the prayer of his mind, of his inner heart and of the various postures we find in The Nine Ways. What St. Thomas speaks of with regard to humble adoration, is precisely what we see here in St. Dominic's prayer. Thomas says, "...we exhibit signs of humility in our bodies in order to incite our affections to submit to God, since it is connatural to us to proceed from the sensible to the intellectual."⁵ Bede Jarrett complements the teaching of St. Thomas when he writes, "The tendency of study by itself is simply to dry up the emotional side of human nature."⁶ We must remember that the Dominican Order has a great respect for the human intelligence and supports doctrinal endeavor and study, but we have this example of Dominic who balanced the intellectual with remarkable devotion as is illustrated in the various forms of adoration during his humble prayer.

Very often St. Dominic prayed in the Church, for he had a special love for the altar. We find him too in the Studium of the convent, interrupting and intermingling his study and *lectio divina* for spells of adoration. Dominic walked much from village, to town, to city, and during his journeys he would again become absorbed in his prayer and his postures of prayer as he walked and sang in what Bede Jarrett calls his "lyric note of gladness."⁷ When his prayer became so intense, he would walk ahead of the Brothers a bit, to adore the Lord and honor Mary (*hyper dulia*) with chants and hymns, such as the *Ave Maris Stella* and the

Salve Regina, allowing the words to enwrap his body and his surroundings as he gave praise to God for the one who bore the Eternal Word and gave him to us for our veneration.

In “The Nine Ways of St. Dominic’s Prayer,” these windows into his adoration of God, we see a creative variety of movements: His initial posture was to bow low to humble himself, saying, *O Lord God, the prayer of the humble and the meek has always pleased you* (Judith 9:16). He would lie with his face flat on the floor in worship. He would scourge himself while reciting the *Miserere* (Psalm 51) and the *De Profundus* (Psalm 129), indicating the penance and sacrifice that is proper to religious life. He would stand straight, filled with awe and adoration of Christ of whom the altar was a significant symbol. He would again stand, and letting his hands take different forms: sometimes a position of pleading for the needs and sins of the people whom he carried in his compassionate heart; at other times his hands were folded as the two covers of a book that contained lessons in charity, that true love of God and neighbor that had taught him everything. In a moment his hands would reach to the very heavens, well above his tonsured head, his body and spirit indicating the presence of God. In short, when we take a serious look at “The Nine Ways,” we recognize them unquestionably and predominantly as prayers and postures of pure adoration of God and concentrated acts of reverence.

The Albigensian Heresy:

We must take time here to speak of a terrible and noxious heresy that is the very antithesis of postures of prayer and the use of the body so proper to adoration. The Albigensian heresy, rampant in northern Italy and southern France during this time, stands as a hideous contrast to the prayer of adoration that Dominic prayed and Thomas taught. This will be clear almost immediately as we look quickly at the most salient and senseless tenets:

The devil, they said, is creator of matter; he is a real god.

- ❖ The Christian God is the creator of spirit-being only.
- ❖ The human soul that had been created good had rebelled and was expelled from heaven. The devil imprisoned the soul in matter.
- ❖ Salvation for the soul consists in liberation from all matter, which includes the body, to return to its original heavenly state.⁸

Further, this heresy refused to accept Christ as God. He was merely an angelic spirit whose body had only a corporal appearance.

Now it becomes clear why the Holy Spirit inspired St. Dominic to use his body so very much in his prayer, for God is the creator and fashioner of all things, especially in his masterpiece, his Son, Jesus: *He (Christ) is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible* (Col. 1:15-16).

The Albigensian teaching on salvation could not have been more erroneous. Real salvation brings real liberation, not from matter, which is good, but from sin, which is evil. Dominic understood all this so keenly that his very own body preached against this menacing heresy when he engaged in prayer. The very fact that Dominic prayed before the crucifix or before the altar, the symbol of Christ and of his sacrifice, attests to his belief that Christ came to save, not to enslave. He came in our flesh, a body like our own.

St. Dominic, of course, believed in the true Christianity which Bede Jarrett says, "...rests upon the Incarnation of the Son of God, the marriage of matter and spirit of the divine and the human, for *the Word became Flesh*."⁹ The Albigensian heresy, declaring all matter unclean and evil, sank ever deeper into error when they said: "The only real act of goodness was the getting rid of life."¹⁰ According to this bizarre heresy, the married state rendered salvation impossible, and parentage was utterly abhorred. To bring this to total absurdity, suicide was held in honor as virtue. "Their prayer," says Bede Jarrett, "was abstraction from consciousness."¹¹ All of this was a repudiation of life, natural and supernatural, of the true faith and of the sacraments.

The sacraments, we must remember, are realities of sacred action and abundant grace, under matter and form. Every sacrament has to do with matter, our body, and the life of God's grace working at the moment of the reception of the sacrament. If we take one example, Baptism; water is poured over the person or there is immersion in water, signifying the saving and sacred action of God: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). The sacrament of Baptism, like all the sacraments, "preach" against this heresy and all heresies, since the sacraments bring us into the presence of the unseen God, the God who enters every event of our lives, with additional graces for these most important events. In Baptism, for example, we become children of God and heirs of heaven.

St. Dominic, Champion of the Incarnation:

Those involved in the Abligensian heresy practiced unreasonable and dreadful austerity, for they hated the body. It must be stated that, yes, Dominic was a man of austerity, which is mentioned repeatedly in the acts of his canonization. So too did he, and the early Dominicans, engage in fasting. However, this was never a denial of his body or of our gifted humanity. St. Dominic could bow low before God at the altar because he was a champion of the Incarnation, a defender of the true faith, a man of sacrificial offering after Christ himself, an expositor of the sacraments and a man who loved humanity profoundly. He was a man of life, not a man of hopelessness. As has been recorded from testimonies of those who knew him, he was seen now with tears, now with laughter, now with compassion, now with generosity and total giving of his time and his few precious possessions, as when he gave his priceless scriptures to be sold to feed the victims of the plague. His austerities were a result of a heart full of tremendous love, and at the centre of his intention with regard to all penance was the salvation of souls, that all might be saved and come to God. His emotions, spent for this same noble motive, poured out copiously in mercy and compassion for all persons made in the image and likeness of God.

All of this has everything to do with the prayer of adoration, a prayer that is the more humble as it recognizes the greatness of God who is to be worshiped and praised, for who he is and for his saving work of Redemption. St. Dominic participated beautifully in this saving work of God in various ways and at various times. Jordan of Saxony tells us that when Dominic died and his body lay in state, many people came to show their devotion and reverence: "Day and night the sick and the infirm came and remained to tell that they had been restored to health. As witness to their cures, they hung over the tomb of this blessed man waxen replicas of (their) eyes, hands, feet, and other parts of the body, depending on the infirmity and the parts of the body restored to health."¹²

We repeat the question: how can we be ablaze with the fire of St. Dominic now that we have studied his inner fire?

- We can be more mindful that postures of prayer signify our worship of God and that every time we genuflect or perform any of these postures. we give witness to our faith.
- We can side with Truth on every level, study the creeds of our faith and place these in relationship with current thought in the world of society and religion. We can be champions of the Incarnation.
- We can be mindful of the tenets of the sixteen great heresies of Christian history (www.carm.org) to counteract them personally through our faith in God as three persons in one God, and in our firm belief that Jesus is true God and true man; we can live the apostle's creed every day of our life.
- We can seek ways to endorse the gospel of life, the dignity of the human person and the dignity of the human body.
- We can assist those who suffer, as St. Dominic did, ever mindful of the poor, the sick, those in need of a compassionate heart.
- We can study The Nine Ways of St. Dominic's Prayer to put all, or some, or even just one into practice on a regular basis, realizing that kneeling and sitting in a contemplative manner are always postures of adoration.

In conclusion, let us take one more glance at St. Dominic. An anonymous author of these pictures that we have studied wrote the following in which it is not difficult to see the reward of his prayer: the wisdom and understanding of God and of the Scriptures. It all comes from worship and adoration: "The brethren thought that it was while praying in this way that the saint obtained his extensive penetration of Sacred Scripture and profound understanding of the divine words, the power to preach so fervently and courageously, and that intimate acquaintance with the Holy Spirit by which he came to know the hidden things of God."¹³

¹ <http://www.op.org/scotty/9way/>

² *S.T. II-II*, q. 84, art. 1, Note: St. Thomas uses the word *latria* for the adoration and praise we render to God, *dulia* for the respect we pay to persons and *hyperdulia* for the honor we give to Mary.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Bede Jarrett, OP, *Life of St. Dominic* (Washington, D.C. / Chicago: Dominican Publications), 89. (Reprint from Image Books and Paulist Press.)

⁵ *S.T. II-II*, q. 84, art 2.

⁶ Jarrett, 89.

⁷ Jarrett, 93.

⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (N.Y., St Louis: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 262.

⁹ Jarrett, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Francis C. Lehner, O.P., *Saint Dominic* (Washington, D.C.: Thomist Press, 1964), 74 ("Libellus of Jordan of Saxony," #97).

¹³ *Ibid.*, "The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic," 159. (Note: Another excellent translation with sketches of "The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic:" Simon Tugwell, O.P., Dublin: Dominican Publication, 1978).

DOMINIC AND THE EARLY MONASTIC TRADITION

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Introduction

We have all read that Dominic treasured three books as particularly influential for his spiritual life: *The Conferences of Cassian*, *The Gospel of Matthew* and the *Letters of St. Paul*; we need to include also the book of *Psalms* which formed the wellspring of his liturgical prayer. These books are listed as the sources of inspiration for St. Dominic.¹ In this paper I would like to reflect on how these sources, especially the teaching in the *Conferences*, are replicated in the example of Dominic's life.

Dominic and Desert Spirituality

St. Dominic's holiness has the stamp of desert spirituality. At Osma, *The Conferences of Cassian* were his guide in the spiritual life. He learned from them the struggle with sinfulness and weakness and the life of virtue which leads to perfection. Blessed Jordan writes:

He loved to read the book called the *Conferences of the Fathers*, which deals with vices and with all matters of spiritual perfection. The paths of salvation outlined therein he carefully studied and tried to imitate with all the strength of his soul. Along with the help of grace, this book refined the purity of his conscience, intensified the light of his contemplation, and raised him to a high level of perfection.²

Certain characteristics stand out as we study some of the great figures of the early monastic movement, as described in Cassian and in other sources. Outstanding among these characteristics: asceticism, separation, renunciation, total surrender to Christ, all of which are means to the goal of purity of heart and the reign of God. What strikes one is the seriousness, tenacity, and unflagging dedication with which these men and women of the early desert tradition undertook the task of purification and transformation. When one or another flagged they were encouraged by the abba, and their brothers and sisters, predominantly through example, and by the Word of God, -- read, memorized and mediated through the men and women of experience and wisdom.

The literature of the desert is about living the Christian life in its essentials, stripping away all but the basic principles of living a Gospel life; seeking God and losing the self in order to be redeemed and transformed. The central teaching of the desert is the theme of reality, the stripping of illusion, the continuous life-long struggle to see God, to become the friend of God. All ascetic effort, personal relationship, life in all its aspects were to be brought into the central relationship with God in Christ. The great virtues of the desert are: humility, discretion, realism, the "single eye" of a life directed to God. Dominic burned with this same zeal for holiness and unflaggingly sought transformation through renunciation and poverty, so that he might "see God." Jordan writes of his zeal:

Because he embraced the Lord's commandments with such burning love and listened to the Spouse's voice with the very pious approval of his good will, the God of the sciences increased his grace, so that he became able, not only to receive the milk of doctrine, but also to make a deep penetration of difficult questions through the humble understanding of his heart and consume the more solid food of mystery with sufficient ease.³

Following of Christ

The *Conferences* are perhaps best seen as maps of the spiritual life. Cassian's Spiritual Theology is Christocentric. Christ pervades his teaching on contemplation, chastity, prayer and spiritual knowledge. The Christological foundations of his work are firm, as is his eschatological foundations.

In the *Conferences* there are numerous citations of the Gospels and the teaching of St. Paul, with reference to the following of Christ and imitation of his example and virtue. For Cassian, "everything which concerns salvation was given...by the Lord."⁴ There is a dynamism inherent in the ascetic life that drives one forward. Radical simplicity and integrity is the principal aim of the desert dwellers. Their radicality centered in the daily seeking to lay aside everything to be transformed in Christ.

Dominic was moved by his love for Jesus Christ, as one who wanted to put on Christ and to become one with the Savior for the sake of all men and women. Catherine of Siena described Dominic as taking up the task of the Word.⁵

The Scripture

St. Dominic's love for Scripture found a profound support in the desert tradition. The Psalms were used by the early monks both for the weekly *synaxis* and for their prayer alone in their cells. They were in their hearts and on their lips as they sought perfection and cried out for salvation. Repetition of the words of the Psalms was a means to fix their minds on God; the rhythm of Scripture verses and especially the Psalms formed the life of unceasing prayer for which the monks strove.

For St. Antony, the archetype of the early desert tradition, Scripture played a prominent role. The words of Jesus in the Gospel started him on his journey. The first part of that journey was evangelical -- hearing and heeding God's call to live a Gospel life. The second was leave-taking, separating oneself from those things that pulled away from God. The monk is pre-eminently one who seeks to live by the Word of God. The life of Antony and the Sayings of the Fathers reflect the great authority of Scripture and its centrality in the quest for salvation.

The value of Scripture was almost always seen in very practical terms relating to salvation and self-knowledge. The Word aided in the battle with the demons; brought healing, and encouragement. It was used to conquer "thoughts," those movements of the mind and heart which distracted the monk from the one thing necessary. The Word of God brought salvation and transformation.

Jordan writes of Dominic that he was drawn to savor the word of God. In his studies at Palencia Dominic broke open the Word, studied with "continual eagerness, to drink from the streams of Sacred Scripture."⁶ The study reverberated in his innermost being and prepared him, like Antony, for his future call as founder and preacher. Dominic was called by the Word to be a "doer of the word" for God's glory and the salvation of all.

For the men and women of the desert, hearing the Word was insufficient if the word did not enter into the heart and transform them. To "hear" carried the connotation of completion in transformation. Hearing the word was a process into which they entered. There are numerous examples of one word being heard and lived with, for a year or more, until it entered into the heart and became a lived reality. Only then was another word sought from the Abba and the process began again. Jordan of Saxony takes up this same theme when he writes:

...there are two ways of keeping God's word, namely, one whereby we store in our memory whatever we hear, and the other whereby we put into practice what we have heard (and none will deny that the latter is more commendable, inasmuch as it is better to sow grain than to keep it stored in the barn). This happy servant of God failed in neither.⁷

To be a "doer of the word," or rather the deep faith that the Word was alive and could transform, was essential to the spirituality of the desert. The monks staked their whole life and endeavour on this truth. The Word of God for them was not a book one read, it was "active and alive," transforming mind and heart; thus could a monk ponder and remain with a single word or phrase of Scripture until its teaching was absorbed into his life.

The Word of God had this same living reality for Dominic. He was a man obedient to God, one who listened attentively to the Word, one directed by the Spirit of God, and one transformed by the Word he heard. The Scripture was the word of Christ; and the work of the Holy Spirit was to teach and make real in the heart of the disciple Jesus' word. The Gospel, for Dominic was the book of life. His principal commitment was to preach the Word of God. His was a missionary vocation and his task was to bring salvation to all men and women. Dominic's appropriation of the Word defined his vocation and separated him from all that was not God's will for him. He sought no lasting city in this life and became a stranger for Christ's sake. His vocation entailed proclaiming the Gospel in all its fullness, and to teaching its truth.

Compunction

Compunction, a tremendously important virtue in the early tradition, can be defined as a condition of the heart: a heart seeking God, profoundly aware of its sin, and the need of God's infinite grace and mercy. Compunction is seen as sorrow at the prospect of losing eternal salvation for oneself or others. The experiential knowledge of ones own insufficiency and sinfulness, ones inability to attain salvation without grace, gives the monk a heart of compassion for the struggles of others, especially in the light of forgiveness, healing and conversion. In *Conference 11*, we read:

When then any one has acquired this love of goodness of which we have been speaking, and the imitation of God, then he will be endowed

with the Lord's heart of compassion, and will pray also for his persecutors, saying in like manner: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). But it is a clear sign of a soul that is not yet thoroughly purged from the dregs of sin, not to sorrow with a feeling of pity at the offences of others, but to keep to the rigid censure of the judge: for how will he be able to obtain perfection of heart, who is without that by which, as the Apostle has pointed out, the full requirements of the law can be fulfilled, saying: *Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ* (Gal 6:2).⁸

When one reflects on the whole theme of compunction in the early tradition, its importance recorded in the sayings of the Fathers and Mothers, Dominic comes strongly to mind. What effect did these words have on Dominic, whose outstanding characteristic was compassion, so frequently witnessed to by those who knew him? The witnesses at the canonization process speak of his great love and compassion, principally for those in need. We are told that he was always cheerful, except when moved to compassion at the sight of someone's affliction, yet he always remained at the same time a man of joy. One of the witnesses remembers that:

Filled with compassion, he most ardently desired his neighbor's salvation. He himself preached constantly and frequently, and in every way he could exhorted the brethren to preach. He sent them out to preach, begging and urging them to be solicitous for the salvation of souls.⁹

Dominic experienced profound sorrow at the remembrance of his sins and deep compassion at the knowledge of the sin that bound others. When at prayer during the night hours, he often manifested the intensity of his feeling with loud groans and supplication, accompanied by copious tears. In the desert, tears flowing from the inner depths of a person were a sign of true compassion.¹⁰ When Dominic wept, which was frequently, he moved others to tears. He often wept when preaching; those listening were stirred to tears and conversion.

Purity of Heart / Unceasing Prayer

A basic requirement of the quest for holiness is intensity of purpose, an unwavering focus to which the monks continually returned. Cassian speaks of the importance of knowing the goal and keeping it ever before us on the spiritual quest. Cassian teaches that the near or proximate goal of the monk is purity of heart. Purity of Heart is the centerpiece of his monastic theology. Purity of Heart involves an inner openness, emptiness, a transparency toward God and the things of God. It's attainment, the highest perfection in this life and a preparation for the ultimate goal of eternally sharing in the life of the Triune God. The early literature presumed that purity of heart could be realized by obedience to God and through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Of supreme importance in the desert tradition was personal integrity before God, without any disguises or pretensions. Integrity is the mark of holiness. In a person of integrity there is no duplicity of the inner life of mind and heart and the outer life of word and actions. The words and actions of the person of holiness reflected the inner life of the heart. Jordan writes of Dominic's that his memory "was a storehouse of divine things ... and his external words and character clearly bespoke what lay hidden within his sacred breast."¹¹ It is

abundantly clear by what was written of Dominic -- his holiness, his transparency, his immense freedom -- that he had attained purity of heart. He stood before God in every situation, attuned to God's will. Everything flowed from his union with God in Christ. The attainment of such union the early tradition considered the angelic life.

Dominic knew well his goal and never lost sight of it. He has been described as perspicacious, one who is insightful and astute. Dominic was characterized by breadth of vision, clear-sightedness and great-heartedness. He balanced all the observances of the Order in the light of the immediate goal: preaching the Word for the salvation of all men and women. His immediate goal for the Order found fruition only in the ultimate goal of eternal life.

Purity of heart and a life of unceasing prayer are synonymous. And Dominic was truly a man of unceasing prayer. The diverse elements that made up Dominic's day found their unity in his union with God. His humble, intense prayer was an almost unbroken conversation with our Lord Jesus Christ, both by day and by night. Jordan of Saxony gives us insight into Dominic's prayer when he writes:

It was his custom to spend his night-watches in prayer and, having shut the door, to pray to the Father in secret.... His frequent and special prayer to God was for the gift of true charity capable of laboring for and procuring the salvation of men, since he deemed that he would be a true member of Christ only when he could devote himself entirely to winning souls, like the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all men, Who offered Himself completely for our salvation.¹²

Radiant Presence

In the Old Testament, the radiance of Moses' face gave testimony to his encounter with God. St. Paul speaks of Moses' veiled face and teaches that *the ministry of the spirit* in the Christian dispensation will be even more glorious (2 Cor 3:8).

How does one explain the immense radiance and attraction of the desert dwellers? In the desert, tenacity and firmness to the "discipline" of life blossoms in joy; and dying, into the radiant sharing of the resurrection anticipated now and possessed fully in the reign of God for all eternity.¹³ Think of Antony emerging from his fort, after twenty years of confronting the demons and living an extreme ascetic life, healthy and radiant with the reflected glory of God's inner presence and tremendous love for his neighbor.¹⁴ Antony's overriding virtue in later life was not fasting/asceticism but his sociability: a magnetic charm, openness to all, such that he drew disciples and crowds of visitors. He was recognized as one whose heart had achieved total transparency to others. Something not possible without self-denial and losing the self.

Jordan describes Dominic as one truly filled with the spirit of God. Sister Cecilia, a Dominican nun who knew St. Dominic, writes: "From out his forehead and between his eyebrows a radiant light shone forth, which drew everyone to revere and love him."¹⁵

From his brow and eyes emanated a kind of radiance which drew everyone to revere and love him. Dominic was genial in his relationship with others. The impression he made was one of strong magnetism, a

unique charm which radiated from his person. He was pleasant and affable. He was friendly to all, peaceable.¹⁶

A contemplative by night, he was an apostle during the day. We are told that his countenance was always open and joyful, a man wholly turned outward to others. Joy, true inner joy, radiance, overflowing in goodness and love are certainly Gospel characteristics. Dominic, like Antony radiated the presence of God, one who had been "Christed" and a "Word" of salvation for others.

Conclusion

The desert tradition is part of our heritage as Dominican nuns. LCM 35. I tells us that our observance:

adopted by St. Dominic from tradition or newly created by him, fosters the way of life of the nuns by helping them in their determination to follow Christ more closely and enabling them to live more effectively their contemplative life in the Order of Preachers.

Dominic wanted this tradition, formative of his own life and holiness, to be decisive for his followers. He wanted us to take seriously and to enter into the way of "discipline" in such a way that we too would be transformed. Along with the early monastics and Dominic let us enter whole-heartedly into the rhythm of our Dominican monastic life, not as observers but as involved and active participants whose lives are focused on the task of holiness and who seek with intensity of purpose "to see God."

¹ See Guy Bedouelle, O.P., *Saint Dominic: The Grace of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 89-103; 215-220.

² *Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents*, ed. Francis C. Lehner, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1964); Jordan of Saxony, "Libellus," #13.

³ *Ibid.*, #7.

⁴ *The Conferences of Cassian*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Paulist Press, 1997, Conference III, Chapter 16.

⁵ *The Dialogue of St Catherine*, ed. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (NY: Paulist Press, 1980), 337.

⁶ *Biographical Documents*, "Libellus," cf. #6, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ramsey, Conference XI.

⁹ *Biographical Documents*, "Canonization at Bologna," #26, 115, Brother John of Spain.

¹⁰ George A. Maloney, S.J., "Penthos - Forgotten Necessity," *Monastic Studies* 7 (1969), 149-159.

¹¹ *Biographical Documents*, "Libellus," #7.

¹² *Ibid.*, #13.

¹³ The term "discipline" was used in the early desert tradition to mean all the observances of the life undertaken by the monk which lead to union with God in Christ.

¹⁴ *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), #14.

¹⁵ See Lehner, *Biographical Documents*, "Miracles of St. Dominic," #15, 183-184.

¹⁶ See Bedouelle, 95. Bedouelle puts together several references from the Canonization process of St. Dominic.

DOMINIC: YOU COULD HAVE TURNED BACK

Sister Mary Vincent, O.P.
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We do not hear of a dramatic conversion story in any of the accounts of St Dominic's life, yet in every life there are contrary winds, crises, and crossroads. With all that St. Dominic accomplished in his very brief life of about 49 years, he could have -- at any point -- turned back.

Dominic was born about 1170 in Caleruega of Old Castile, southern Spain, rugged country even to this day. The legendary figure, the Cid Campeador, had just recently freed Spain of the attacks of the Moors and that new-found freedom of life and love of the Faith was in the air that the young Dominic breathed. We do not know much of his early life. Tradition tells us that his noble mother, Jane of Aza carefully reared her children. Early educated by an uncle who was a priest, Dominic went on to the University of Palencia to study everything that was offered to him: history, mathematics, astronomy, Latin, dialectics, philosophy and theology. His family must have had means to be able to provide this education and we are told Dominic had books: priceless, hand-made books. Blessed Jordan tells in his *Libellus*:

He began to develop a passionate appetite for God's words, finding them "sweeter than honey to his mouth." His eagerness to imbibe the streams of holy Scripture was so intense and so unrelenting that he spent whole nights almost without sleep, so untiring was his desire to study...and the truth was stored away....¹

Dominic could have lessened this ardor and interest. Was it worth it? He was, no doubt, exhausted in the mornings. The pastimes of the young invited him. His companions did not much share his enthusiasm. But he did not turn back. There was a severe famine in almost all of Spain. Dominic sold his annotated books. Hours of labor at night, as the candle burned low, gathering information and painstakingly writing it down in costly and uncommon volumes -- given away that hungry people might be fed. Dominic was not the cold, budding Inquisitor, but a sensitive, feeling young man who noticed and cared for those in need. Now without his books, but with a good conscience and clear purpose, he did not turn back.

The bishop of the area, venerable Diego of Osma heard about Dominic and invited him to join the Canons Regular at the Cathedral Church. Diego was pursuing a reform and greater discipline. Dominic wanted to be a priest, but a canon of St. Augustine? A secular priest could have a more free life. Then there were the Benedictines of Silos to whom Dominic's mother had carried him before he was born and often no doubt, during his childhood. In the face of opposite attractions, Dominic chose the life of the Canon. He "haunted the church by day and by night, devoting himself ceaselessly to prayer and contemplation" (*Libellus*, #12). This was a young man, full of passion and yearning for God. There could have been outlets, compromises. He did not turn back.

We are fortunate to have a description of Dominic given to us by a nun who knew him. Sr. Cecilia writes:

The blessed Dominic was of medium height and of slight build. His countenance was beautiful, of fair complexion, with light auburn hair and beard and luminous eyes. A kind of radiance shone from his brow, inspiring love and reverence in all. Full of joy, he seemed ever ready to smile, unless moved to compassion by the affliction of his neighbor. His hands were long and shapely, his voice strong, noble and sonorous. He was never bald, and his tonsure was complete, sprinkled with a few white hairs.²

So this man Dominic was very attractive, with an easy elegance and grace. Before he died he told his brothers he found young women very attractive. Some of the worried brethren, for a time excised this confession from the records. But it remains as a truthful acknowledgment of his humanness. Dominic had felt the attraction and passion of a lover. Even so, he did not turn back. Christ was his great love.

We are even more fortunate to have a favorite and special prayer that Dominic often prayed. Jordan, knowing the power and secret it revealed, took pains to record it:

He [Dominic] had a special prayer which he often made to God, that God would grant him true charity which would be effective in caring for and winning the salvation of men; he thought he would only really be a member of Christ's Body when he could spend himself utterly with all his strength in the winning of souls, just as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of us all, gave himself up without reserve for our salvation (*Libellus*, #13).

Fr. Simon Tugwell, O.P. says "it is hard to avoid the impression that for him (Jordan) this special prayer at Osma in some way provides the key to his (Dominic's) subsequent life."³ Jesus Christ was the center of his life, its driving force, the wisdom he ever sought, the truth he lived by and yearned to impart.

Dominic's life was Christ; his ardent prayer was a pleading for true charity; notice the adjective "true." Dominic did not want gifts, but THE gift that would achieve something for God. He was pressing forward, looking for the springs of life – Christ and the charity that flowed from this Divine Fountain. Immersed in this Fountain Dominic could do great things for God. He was never ashamed to beg – especially for the charity that walked, worked, transformed people's minds, hearts and lives. "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me*, to bring all to immortal happiness as a living part of Christ."⁴ "Another himself" as the Eternal Father would later reveal to St. Catherine. Here burned Dominic's desire. Here his gaze was ever focused: on the One who gave everything and gives everything now. Utterly like Jesus who was without reserve for us - Dominic would not turn back.

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.... Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own...brethren...our commonwealth is in heaven...(Phil 3: 8,9,12, 20).⁵

Dominic's prayer pressed for an answer. And he received it in a surprising turn of events -- a trip across Europe with Bishop Diego. Travel was slow and arduous, but it revealed needs, more desperate than he or his bishop could have imagined: anarchy, confusion, terrible poverty, invading hordes of unbelievers, causing untold havoc and suffering. They were deeply concerned and, being true lovers of the Church, sought audience with the Pope, Innocent III. The Pope re-directed their offers and concern. Would they, with a band of Cistercian abbots, engage in a preaching project in Southern France to draw back to the fold the great portions of the people who were being deceived and misled. Sadly the secular clergy were often not educated themselves and were, moreover, involved in the care of lands and benefices. Diego and Dominic set off.

Though they tried, no progress was made. Diego realized that they were too abundantly supplied with provisions. All the baggage must be abandoned. The misguided teachers and their followers had denounced a wealthy church and advocated simplicity in following Christ who lived and died poor. In this they were right. Dominic followed his bishop's wise lead. They became really poor and thus witnessed to the Christ who *emptied himself*. Soon they gathered a small group of women and the Monastery of Saint Mary of Prouilhe was born. The year was 1206. There were debates with the leaders of the sects. People were interested, changing their minds. But the going was painfully hard and slow. Then there was a bolt from the blue. Diego died.

The missionaries all returned home. Dominic alone would not turn back. He remained and continued to preach and reach out to any and all who would listen. Many harassed and even hunted him. There are in Dominic's country to this day, marked trails and small wayside shrines where he passed often on his journeys. He would sing. He would tell his would-be assassins to do a slow job of it, if they wanted to kill him. His bishop and his best friend, Diego was no longer with him. He must have considered the possibility of returning to his beloved homeland, Spain and to the Cathedral church of Osma. How long had it been since he had seen his family, his friends? How long since he had known the quiet comfort, peace and security of a religious house where his brethren were seeking God. And no doubt, he would be welcomed and honored as a hero. Why stay here? The times were violent amid political and religious upheavals. Angry bands on horseback were ruining the crops of the toil-worn people. The people lived under a cloud of doubt, frustration and struggle. The rich were getting richer, the poor, poorer. Dominic stood at the crossroads, but did not waver. The people needed him. They needed the Gospel message of hope. There were contrary winds to face. He would not turn back.

And so, Dominic with all his energy and passionate zeal, set himself to win all the souls he could for Christ. His heart was full of an extraordinary, almost incredible, yearning for the salvation of everyone (*Libellus*, #34).

This is a truly most marvelous passage -- describing the deepest Dominic. Love for Christ, boundless yearning; this was Dominic! Every day and every night. Until he died, consumed, offered without reserve, like the apostle and priest, Jesus Christ. For his Body the Church.

For more than ten years Dominic moved from place to place in Southern France, reaching out to all. The Pope's legate was assassinated and a disastrous war soon raged across the land. Dominic stayed on until his friend, Simon de Montfort's death. It must have been incredibly difficult, but he knew he must act and act quickly. He did not want war or polemic. Both sides were God's children and he was a preacher of Christ's message of peace.

After many years of labor, more or less alone, he had about fifteen men who had joined him. Just fifteen followers. *Have I toiled in vain?* But he did not look at this as failure. He was a man of prayer and hope. Dominic would continue to provide for his sisters in the Monastery at Prouilhe. It had been from the start and happy and blessed interchange and commerce of life and mutual giving. Dominic had been their father and brother for ten years as they formed with him the *Sancta Praedictio*. The nuns would grow and hold fast (through eight centuries).

Then Dominic dispersed his brethren to Paris, Bologna and Madrid. It was August 15, 1217. Far from turning back, there were, for him four, final unbelievable years. After more than 7,500 miles⁶ of walking (yes, walking!) across Europe, across the Alps and the Pyrenees, Dominic crossed the boundaries of indifference and skepticism to the realization of an order of preachers who would be free to go wherever they were needed. He carefully and astutely sought and received the permissions that were needed. Dominic, as man of prayer, priest and loyal son of the Church, could see that there were now laborers for the harvest. His work was coming to its end.

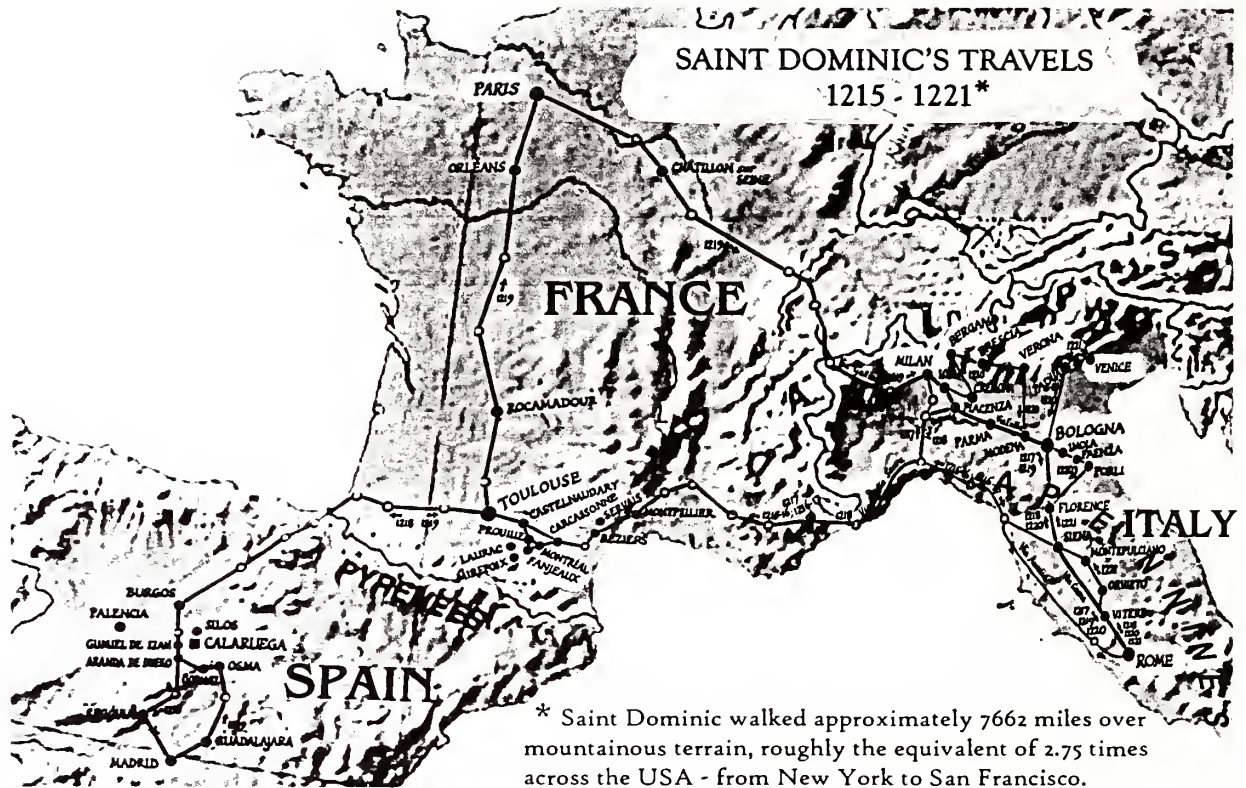
In the hot summer of 1221 Dominic was preaching in Italy. His great desire was to preach the glad tidings of hope to those who did not yet know the sweet and saving Name of Jesus. Vicaire makes the most surprising statement that Dominic's personal vocation was was first a missionary and only secondly a founder.⁷ William of Montferrat who knew Dominic for sixteen years testified that they had agreed and promised that after the Order was founded they would go north to the pagans.⁸ We can see them bending over the map and making their plans. Later William would go the far north, and Dominic would be with him and with all his sons and daughters in spirit, inspiring them with wisdom and courage from his own life of prayer and utter gift of himself. His great dream would be fulfilled in them: to reach out to the far ends of the earth.

Now the brethren entreated him to rest. No, not yet. He had no bed of his own. His nights were spent in the church. His cries came from his eager, longing spirit. Through the years he had uttered these cries to his Father. They were cries for sinners. He ever grieved for the people, his people, Christ's sheep. *Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!* (Matt 23:27). Yet, sometimes they may have been cries that he himself, would not turn back. So many were indifferent. He had tried. He was human. Perhaps Dominic, like Paul, had heard these words of re-assurance: *Fear not...I am with you* (Acts 18:9); and, *My companion in suffering, you will share in my overflowing happiness* (2 Cor 1:7). He would not turn away from the Mystery. He would not turn back.

Dominic knew he was dying. He wanted to be buried under the feet of his brethren. He promised them and us that he would be of more use to us in heaven, than on earth. He lifted up his hands like the priest offering the oblation at Mass. Dominic offered everything he was and had and could have had. The angels came to meet him. He had not turned back – ever.

Blessed Father, Dominic, we thank you for the prayer, the passion, the struggle, and the victory of your life. And for calling us to share in the family you founded. Lead us to the Fountain of Life that we may be filled and overflow -- to the ends of the earth -- like you, great lover and missionary of Jesus Christ.

For the joy which lay before him – for himself and those for whom he toiled – Dominic, you never turned back.



¹ Jordan of Saxony: *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, ed. and trans. Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Dominican Sources: New Editions in English* (Parable, USA, 1982), ch. 1, #6 & 7. If we are inclined to doubt the reality of a great passion for truth and beauty in a young heart we need only recall the intense lives of a Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert who gave themselves from their earliest years to their art; or better, to our own St Agnes, Catherine of Siena or Rose who lived and loved so ardently from their earliest years; or the deep St. Thomas of Aquinas or the vibrant Vincent Ferrer.

² Bl. Cecilia, "A Portrait of Blessed Dominic," ed., Francis C. Lehner, O.P., *Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents* (Washington, DC: Thomist Press, 1964), 183-184. Fr Lehner remarks (on page 161) in the introduction of the chapter quoted that "Cecilia must be taken seriously....We are more certain now, than ever before, that her description of Dominic is accurate."

³ Simon Tugwell, O.P., "Christ as Model of Sanctity in Humbert of Romans," in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans*, editors Kent Emery, Jr., & Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 92.

⁴ To be "another himself" as the Eternal Father would later reveal to St Catherine: "...there is no way she can so savor and be enlightened by this truth as in continual and humble prayer, grounded in the knowledge of herself and God. For by such prayer the soul is united with God, following in the footsteps of Christ crucified, and through desire and affection of love he makes of her another himself." Catherine of Siena *The Dialogue*, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. & ed. by Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 25.

⁵ Biblical quotations are from the RSV, 1962.

⁶ See the above map of Dominic's journeys of these last years of his life.

⁷ Cf. H.-M. Vicaire, O.P., *Genius of Saint Dominic, A Collection of Study-Essays* (Nagpur, India: Dominican Publications, 1990), 129-130.



The Mountain of Light

Dominic: Who was this dynamic man
Whose inner strength broke open Gospel truth?
Who was he, whose humbleness lifted high the Word
As a torch for all the world to see ... who was he
Who chose to be beneath his brothers' feet?

Dominic: A mountain filled with volcanic fire
A giant, bursting with Christ, filled with vibrant desire.
A peaceful tower of compassion, who stood firm and calm
A rock of truth - against falsehood and deceit.
A sword of Wisdom in his mouth.

Dominic: Sending forth a million points of light
Into a world darkened by sin, hate and power.
Bright rays of white against the black walls of error,
Reaching for souls to the very gate of hell,
His cry still echoes,
"What will become of sinners"?

Dominic: The purity of his life still challenges us today! His joyful
Spirit still rings through every city, every village, every land.
His voice still preaches justice and truth
In all who follow his untiring steps.
His mountain still stands upon the world spreading points of light.

The Gospel in his hand,
his heart a flame,
this is DOMINIC.

FOLLOW HIM!

Sr. Mary Angela, OP
Langley, B.C., Canada

CATHERINE OF SIENA: HER FELLOWSHIP OF FRIENDS

Sister Mary Regina, O.P.
Langley, B.C., Canada

Introduction

So often we have heard the saying: "Tell me who are your friends, and I will tell you who you are." This study of St. Catherine and some of the friends who made up her closely-knit circle of followers will attempt to show Catherine and these many persons -- as they grew, blossomed and took a part in each other's lives and indeed, in the life of the Church at that crucial time of its history.

The fact that Catherine of Siena enjoyed the friendship of very many people is incontestable. We cannot live and grow in isolation. Isolation leads to sickness and depression. Catherine, by contrast, grew through her friends to such an extent, that her very personality expanded through these encounters. Each one of her friends was like another horizon, another large arched rainbow, or like the stretch of the sky at sea. Her life was an enrichment of their life, and theirs of hers. As we shall see, the love she had for her friends was a means for Catherine to express her humanity. We transform others by allowing ourselves to be transformed. However, the great commandment to *love one another just as I have loved you*,¹ had to develop, especially in her early years.

To better understand this paramount aspect of love of God and love of neighbor, it will be good to go to that small room Catherine stayed in for three years prior to beginning her public ministry. As Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his diary, "The longest journey we make is the journey inward."² Catherine has just procured permission from her mother, Monna Lapa, and her father, Jacopo, not to marry, but under strained circumstances. The parents and the large family household are furious that their daughter steadfastly refused to concede to their wishes. Catherine matches the emotion and is adamant, so much so that to avoid all question of matrimony, she pours vinegar on the wound of refusal by cutting off her lovely locks. In reprisal her parents allot her this small room that measures 9' x 12' with red brick pavement and a high window, reached only by three stairs.³

This high window in Catherine's very small cell played an important part in the formation of her spirituality. She could not possibly have realized it would provide spiritual nourishment for half her soul; that part of her which was so interested in people. What she learned from the happenings outside that window formed her into a strong pillar of love.

On the one hand, she was solitary, praying to God, forging her strong union with Jesus Christ Crucified and Son of the Father, and seeking always the abiding presence of the gentle Jesus and His mother the gentle Mary. On the other hand, there was the ever-present window that provided the noise of the street, the footsteps that evidenced every emotion, the yells, the shouts, the cries, the lovers' whispers, the children in life

and laughter, the quarreling, the singers, the buyer and the sellers. There would be the sound of horse hoofs, the bray of donkeys, the roll of ox-carts and teams of mules. Little by little over the span of these three short years, Catherine was given the insight and the grace to combine the two. Ironically, the very people she initially sought to avoid so as to concentrate on prayer and union with God, she actually encountered in a more intense way in this small room the size of a large closet. They entered into her hearing, into her heart, into her prayer and into her spirituality. She could hear their sorrows and their joys as they passed by. She took them to heart to such a degree, that when she left this hermitage to begin serving others, the passage was easy, for she went from love of God to love of neighbor, from service in prayer to service in action.

The years Catherine spent in her small room, living in secluded hermit fashion in the Benincasa home, provided and developed in her an incalculable union with God. But she had friends, many friends who were drawn to her and who loved her. While these, her dear friends could not define the indefinable, they felt and knew the grace of God in Catherine, a grace beyond a human telling, a very presence of "Him who is." The human works of charity, which also included the wonderful relationships of exchange and friendship, plus the outstanding spiritual life surging in Catherine became as two strong streams flowing into one river.

The *Caterinati* was a close-knit fellowship of like-minded people in Siena, and later beyond the confines of that city, who recognized Catherine Benincasa as a spiritual guide and leader. At first the group was small, since it was spontaneously formed when Catherine began her public ministry, visiting the Misericordia Hospital and other such institutions and persons in need of physical and spiritual assistance.

It would be tempting to think of Catherine as one whose heart and mind resided on a spiritual cloud, exclusive of the need of the neighbor. Not so, for much of the awe of the Sienese over Catherine developed as they observed not only her intense piety, but also as they witnessed her tireless ministrations on the practical level, be it washing the clothes of the sick, dressing their sores, feeding them, etcetera. The ungrateful woman, Tecca, so full of spite for Catherine's benefactions as she dressed her repulsive and infectious skin lesions, is only one of countless examples. There was also that other charity, her work in her home at Fontebranda and in other person's households. All her biographers tell of her nights, not spent in sleep, but spent rather in the unfinished business of the home, the cellar and the countless needs in the realm of the practical. Throughout these practical and "unpractical" services, her humanity developed and we can guess that how her capacity for true friendship grew.

Gradually, her friends, the *Caterinati*, followed her in all these works, ever alert to the needs of others. No one was an enemy or stranger to Catherine or those who joined her group. Friendships flowered among them. To say they loved Catherine is an understatement. To say they loved one another cannot be overlooked. The more she encountered her neighbor, and everyone was a neighbor to be loved, the more they in turn recognized a most powerful dynamic of spirituality in her and in themselves.

It cannot be emphasized too much that all kinds of men and women of every walk and stamp joined the fellowship, the *Caterinati*. Her friends and her ministry were as diverse as the sounds and people that had swished past her small cell window when she was a hermit. The impressive reality of love drew each person; both by the love they observed being poured out by Catherine for others, and the love she imbibed and

shared with them individually. Gradually this love in Catherine burst beyond proportion, for they recognized that she was a mystic far beyond the ordinary. They became more and more aware and amazed at the degree of union with God Catherine enjoyed. Some of these friends played a more prominent place in the *Caterinati* than others.

Catherine's Friends

Lisa Colombini, married to Catherine's half brother Bartolomeo, actually lived with their children in the Benincasa home. Lisa had been born of the prestigious Colombini family, a fact that could easily have caused her to look down on Catherine. Here is Lisa, a woman accustomed to being waited on and served with diligence and exactitude. One almost expects her to be demanding and sharp with Catherine. After all, the children and the chores present a handful, and when Catherine leaves the hermitage room after the three years, all this work will fall on her shoulders. Contrary to any spirit of haughty prestige and impatience, none was so kind and understanding as Lisa. The good Lisa, the large hearted Lisa, is able to forego her privileges for genuine friendship. Lisa is a peacemaker. Initially the family mood is stiff when Catherine resumes her presence with them. Lisa stands by Catherine to assist her through the transition. She understood that Catherine was more than a household servant. She intuitively recognized the holiness and wisdom of Catherine. This was the beginning of the *Caterinati*: Catherine and Lisa Colombini. However, many, many others would join the group, some among these her intimate friends, others close friends, and others who were acquaintances whom she loved and who loved her in return.

Francesca Gori, a high-ranking member of the Dominican Third Order, befriended Catherine at about the same time as Lisa. The two forged a deep friendship with Catherine generally addressing Francesca affectionately as simply "Cecca." The two could confide the inner depths of the heart. Both Cecca and Lisa were older than Catherine and mothers of families. They possessed the maturity of age, applying encouragement and support at every juncture; they were her defense when needed, a bulwark of protection. They followed her everywhere, putting into capsule all her words to store them in their hearts. Cecca and Lisa's influence lightened Catherine's spirit adding more and more weight to her inner humanity. Alice Curtayne relates, "Catherine was a changed being when animated by (their) conversation, her face becoming sweet and gay, her regard frank and penetrating."⁴

Alessa Saracini, a widow, came from one of the five great Sienese families. She too did not allow her more cultured way of life to hamper a genuine and faithful friendship with Catherine. Alessa seems to have added a maternal touch to her friendship. At the time of their meeting, Catherine had reached her early twenties, still young for all her natural and supernatural intelligence. Unlike Lisa and Cecca, Alessa was a woman of culture and educated, possessing an ability to read and write Latin. Alessa, so taken with Catherine, sold her home to pick up lodging near the Benincasa residence. Catherine would accept Alessa's hospitality for days or weeks, according to her need of silence and prayer. The two women shared compatibility in their love for words, their love for silence, and the balance of both. The providence of God worked through Alessa on behalf of Catherine, since she knew all the history of the politics of State, Empire and Church from the inside. Few were as equipped from experience to share these in detail with Catherine, thus providing her with an early education for

understanding religious, cultural and political events of past, present and future. And Catherine would die in Alessa's gentle, loving arms, surrounded by her closest friends.

Bonaventura, Catherine's sister, died just prior to Catherine shutting herself up in the small room to be a recluse for three years. However, Bonaventura and the young Catherine had forged a unique friendship and bond, sharing the inner longings of the heart. Lisa, Francesca and Alessa compensated a great deal for this loss, assisting Catherine into the ways of maturity where Bonaventura left off. How true are the words of Sirach: *Whoever fears the Lord makes true friends, for as a person is, so is his friend too* (6:17 NJB).

The Dominican friars were among Catherine's dearest friends. She loved the friars, the nuns, the laity and the special woman's group of the Dominican laity at the time, of which she became a member. Can a building become a "friend?" She felt a special affinity with an enormous red brick Gothic structure on the hill of Camporeggi, the Church of San Domenico, five minutes walk from her home. During her three years in her small "hermit" room, Catherine could see a bit of San Dominico. This Church became her friend in a unique way: the sight of it filled her with more and more longing for God. The edifice drew her spirit into interior expressions of love. The sound of the bell reverberated joy in her spirit. Alice Curtayne says, "The friars in black and white who lived (at the convent) were men of peace among a congregation always armed, always thinking of war and discussing war: war with a neighboring republic."⁵

Tommaso dalla Fonte's brother married into the Benincasa family. When his parents died, he lived in the Benincasa home, becoming like a brother to Catherine. They shared a mutual love for the Dominicans, resulting in Tomaso joining the Order. He becomes Catherine's first spiritual director. A good choice for his mildness and genuine friendship, but not the stature of a theologian Catherine needed. Still, life evolves, and the natural and supernatural friendship these two enjoyed worked one more thread in the tapestry of Catherine's life.

Matteo Cenni enjoyed a life-long friendship with Catherine. It began when Catherine started to frequent the Misericordia Hospital, whose rector was Matteo. Catherine and Matteo possessed the same deep compassion for the sick, suffering, and destitute of the hospital. Matteo had begun his ministry there as an act of reparation for his earlier life of dissolute behavior. Their mutual friend, William Flete, the Lecceto hermit, had led him to conversion. It was quite natural for Matteo to join the ever-growing fellowship, the *Caterinati*.

A very moving drama that illustrates their deep friendship occurred during the devastating, horrific plague of 1374-5, when Matteo was mortally stricken. He had joined Catherine's fellowship in caring for the dying at this time, a task of mercy rendered only by the most heroic, since half the population of Siena perished, leaving disease and stench everywhere. Of a sudden, the beloved Matteo was down, down so pitifully, and like the other diseased, hopeless and beyond remedy. When Catherine got the news, she flew up the stairs to him, crying out, "Get up, get up, Matteo, this is not the time for you to lie in bed!"⁶ God had worked a miracle through Catherine's prayer that day for her treasured friend. He was completely restored to health. No one stricken by the plague escaped death, none but Matteo and another of Catherine's friends, Father Delle Vigne, for whom also she begged God for a miracle.

William Flete the Augustinian hermit of the Lecceto, a man renowned among the people of the area, became a humble follower of Catherine. He unhesitatingly and frequently sought her advice. By day he preached on mission, returning to his monastery for prayer, living mostly on a diet of water mixed with vinegar. Although William Flete was not a member of the *Caterinati*, his meetings with Catherine evidenced a mature friendship, for in addition to sharing on the level of spirituality; they were compatible enough to disagree to a measure, an element not foreign to real friends. Flete wisely directed many a hardened sinner to Catherine, imploring them just to visit her, knowing that the grace of repentance worked through her to capture them for God. With these encounters, they invariably joined her fellowship of friends.

Bartolomeo Dominici, a Dominican friar and friend of Tommaso dalla Fonte, also became a friend of Catherine. As the *Caterinati* or fellowship increased, everyone grew more and more in awe of Catherine. Her words were rich with spontaneous teachings flowing without effort from her heart to her tongue. These had to be captured. Bartolomeo gathered up as many fragments of her speech as he could. Their friendship, however, met an initial snag, with Bartolomeo wondering and scrutinizing her validity as a true mystic. He had every reason to be skeptical, half of Siena by this time wondered about her. Indeed she had her enemies as well as her supporters. Gradually he was convinced. Alice Curtayne writes, "This friendship with Bartolomeo Dominici had a profound and lasting influence on Catherine's intellectual development."⁷ The learned Bartolomeo had procured his doctorate at Bologna, was a lecturer at the University of Siena and a studious, penetrating Dominican, acquiring a reputation for learning in the Order. He was a delegate of peace, as were many of the *Caterinati*. Catherine in her turn, encouraged him with letters full of sublime doctrine.

Neri (Ranieri) di Landoccio dei Paglianesi appeared on the scene at the perfect time. As Catherine became well known, it became imperative for her to send letters. Many of the Benincasa family had moved to Florence because of the political change in Siena and for financial reasons. At first Alessa wrote Catherine's letters. Then she met Neri, a poet by nature, a man with a way with words, and because of this, a complement to Catherine's sensitive and artistic nature. However, this young aristocrat suffered a terrible inner melancholy and a hyper-sensitivity. Bartolomeo, who endeavored to keep pen and paper in hand, felt that Neri would be the better scribe for letters and the dictation coming from Catherine so frequently. She had a lasting and moving influence on Neri who repaid her patient goodness to him by offering to be her major secretary. It was a win/win situation, for Catherine's genius of expression calmed the hyper Neri to allow his own gifts to rise out of the tomb.

Francesco Malavolti possessed a temperament just the opposite of the poetic Neri. Sad to say, Malavolti lived the spirit of carnival the year round. This man of nobility, married to a young Sienese and rather young himself, suffered from a weakness for women. Neri sought to capture him for Catherine. Malavolti, filled with ridicule, finally consented to meet her. The encounter was electrifying. The arrogant Malavolti wept, confessed, and to the surprise of all joined Catherine's growing group of friends at Fontebranda, the district of tanners and dyers in the city.

Malavolti made a unique contribution to the arena of the *Caterinati*: a robust sense of humor! For all of Catherine's serious side, we see her open to humor, evident in the world of contrast, surprise, and incongruity. Francesco Malavolti brought laughter to the group and to Catherine.

Master Gabriele Volterra, a Franciscan Provincial, and **Father Giovanni Tantucci**, an Augustinian, both felt distrust at the very thought of Catherine. Both were learned, both well known, both ready to trap Catherine as they spoke to her on their first visit. Catherine's words became a mirror of their material indulgence, and in these words they saw themselves as they really were before God. They not only received the grace of immediate repentance, but they also came to a deep remorse as Catherine spoke. They abandoned their possessions and splendor and radically changed their lives.

Raimondo delle Vigne (of Capua) met Catherine when she needed him most. As strange events go, she was summoned to the Dominican General Chapter held in May, 1374 in Florence. By now Catherine was not only the talk of Siena, but of the entire run of Italian City States. Her mysticism, theology, miracles, fasting and spontaneous sermons, plus the enormous following of *Caterinati*, attracted the attention of the Dominican friars in General Chapter. Catherine was duly and carefully interviewed on all aspects of her activities of Church, ministry, the Order, her fellowship and on doctrine. They laid down only one recommendation: Catherine must have a spiritual director of exceptional quality. They appointed Raimondo delle Vigne, a friar of learning, a preacher and teacher, and a man who would eventually become Master of the Order.

Raimondo, now Catherine's confessor and director and her very dear friend, would in time, write her biography. The Chapter and Master of the Order sent Raymond to Siena, not only to minister in that city, but also to be near Catherine. He was an aristocrat by birth, and sixteen years older than Catherine. His field of excellence, Scripture and Patrology, equipped him well for the receptive and active mind of Catherine Benincasa. The two were not a set of Dominican "twins." Catherine was ardent, quick, spontaneous, creative, passionate, intuitive, and yes, impulsive. By contrast, Raimondo was deliberate, cautious, discerning, and patient. With regard to patience, Catherine would at times talk about God non-stop. Raimondo found himself once in a while falling asleep as she expounded with great fervor and at great length. All the same, Alice Curtayne makes this statement of tribute: "The moment he met Catherine, he touched the point of greatness, because he rose immediately to some perception of her possibilities. He was so magnificent in this that the tribute cannot be over-emphasized."⁸

Catherine stayed in Florence for only a few weeks. During this time she continued to exercise her remarkable facility for making friends. Among the impressive number were: Niccolò Soderini, one of the Florentine governors; Don Juan of Cells, a famous penitent; Francesco Pippino, a tailor, Pietro Canigiani, Florentine ambassador; and innumerable others, including nuns and priests.⁹ Florence contributed immensely toward Catherine's understanding of Church and State as it existed at this historical juncture.

Raimondo and Catherine shared a mutual conviction and desire to stir up Christendom for another Crusade. The Italian cities, all at war with one another and experiencing much internal strife, became another common concern. Gregory XI, residing in Avignon and not in Rome, as well as the corruption of so many of the clergy, posed a mutual sorrow. Throughout the rest of Catherine's life, and as we shall see, progressively, they and the fellowship prayed and worked to address these problems.

At the time of the plague, Raimondo was stricken the dread disease. Catherine knelt at his bedside and prayed so long that after an hour and a half, poor Raimondo despaired of her attention for his cure and his life. Then she suddenly came out of her prayer and without a word, rose to prepare food for him. This seemed more than curious to Raimondo, who only gradually realized the cure was in process and that he could indeed eat and drink and walk. Raimondo, like most of these closest friends, remained with her the rest of her life, and was her delegate on various missions, even accompanying her to the Italian cities, to Avignon and eventually to Rome.

Niccolò di Toldo, a young Perugian aristocrat in Siena, found himself suddenly arrested and condemned to death for a mere slip of the tongue against the Sienese government. Curtayne calls the sentence savage, which indeed it was. Had Siena and Perugia not been at odds, Niccolò would be free. True despair and rage entered into the young man. Impervious to all efforts to calm him, Catherine was called to Niccolò. Through the grace of God and prayer, she brought him to the sacraments, prepared him gently for his inevitable death, and miraculously received in turn a gentle response at every encounter.

There developed a deep friendship between the two. The young fellow allowed Catherine to mold him like moist clay into the image of Christ Crucified, Christ who willingly laid down his life. When the time came for execution, Catherine knelt at the spot where the victim stood. Later she wrote about this wrenching experience to Raimondo: "He knelt down with great meekness; and I stretched out his neck and bent down over him, reminding him of the Blood of the Lamb, He said naught save 'Jesus' and 'Catherine.' And, so saying, I received his head into my hands, closing my eyes in the Divine Goodness and saying, 'I will.'"¹⁰ The union of pure love of God and the perfection of grace and friendship inextricably united Catherine and Niccolò. The blood from his head, held by Catherine, saturated her clothes, a fact that simply sent her into even greater realms of prayer, an experience so unique, so filled with love and desire that she carried it with her the rest of her life.

Stefano Maconi could be dubbed an understudy of Neri di Landoccio. However, it was not clone-likeness, although Stefano did replace Neri as Catherine's scribe. Catherine and the fellowship, along with Raimondo, worried over the political situation rife with war and its attendant turmoil throughout Italy. At this time Catherine began writing to Pope Gregory XI in Avignon about her concerns, offering advice, filling the lines with the spirituality that activated her own heart. She could not know if Gregory received her letter, so she sent her dear Neri to Gregory, putting Stefano in his place as her letter writer.

Alice Curtayne describes Stefano Maconi: "...he was an unusually complete fellow. Handsome, dashing, always splendidly accoutred and mounted, cultured, sweet-tempered and pure in his life."¹¹ He also enjoyed confrontation with his family's enemies, two other Sienese Families. Finally Stefano's mother called for peace. However, the vice of confrontation just would not come to a halt for Stefano, whose heart beat for it as quick the feet of his horse could run. His mother and others finally swayed him to meet Catherine. There he stood in distain of her and in much embarrassment, and there his heart came to a halt. What did Catherine do to cause him to be immediately receptive and change? Curtayne says it so well: "Catherine greeted him with that casual intimacy reserved for old friends." As he related the family quarrels to her, he received the grace to understand the foolishness of it all. Before long Stefano took on the wider vision of

Catherine for the Church, for Siena and for the Italian cities; she gave him a new horizon. He later became the Head of the Carthusian Order and worked with great success to re-establish unity in the Church and his Order torn apart by the great Schism.

Gregory XI cannot be understood in the light of friendship with Catherine until we review a bit of the history of the time. In 1375 Catherine and the fellowship of friends relinquished their passion for the crusade for two reasons: The moral disorder in Italy had reached its zenith; the enemy, the arrogant French Legates seemed bent on crushing the Italian cities in the worst possible manner. At first Siena, Pisa and Lucca maintained neutrality. Eventually, however, they too joined the cities known as "The Tuscan League." Catherine and the fellowship were thrown into the world of politics, exercising their inner religious convictions for the moral good at every turn, voicing concerns to prelate and populous, while at the same time working for peace through strenuous prayer. The one encouraging buzz about, and this encouraging possibility offered a ray of hope: Gregory XI, now in Avignon, might return to Rome!

Unfortunately, Gregory in Avignon, appointed nine new Cardinals. Of the nine, seven were French. Keeping in mind that the clash between the Italians and the French was at its pitch at this point, there was yet another impasse: One of these French Cardinals, the hated and detestable Abbot of Marmoutier, a man of terrible intrigue and murderous menace, stood as top enemy of "The Tuscan League." To the Italians, this simply seemed a replay of past cruelty.

As the tug of war began with new vigor, Catherine initiates correspondence with Pope Gregory. This must not be seen as whim on her part. She had already traveled to Florence and Pisa as emissary of peace, and she and her friends collaborated in peaceful efforts on other fronts. Through all this, an ever-developing new phase begins in the life of Catherine and her traveling entourage, her fellowship. Neri visited the Pope first. Meanwhile Catherine, inextricably engaged in the drama that unfolds, feels keenly the pain of Florence, the city of too much mischief, now experiencing Gregory's heavy blow, the hard hitting decision of interdict. With this preliminary history in mind, we can backtrack to view Gregory more finely. Known as Peter Roger de Beaufort, he was made Cardinal at age eighteen, then Pope at age forty. Gregory was ordained priest the day before he was crowned Pope. History knows him as scholarly and learned, frail in health, a good man, but not firm.

Catherine wrote to Gregory six times prior to her visit to Avignon. Her letters, characteristically dictatorial in tone, she sweetened with her expressions of deference. In turn, Gregory showed patience and courtesy toward Catherine in his return post. Catherine spoke only a Tuscan variety of Italian, while Gregory knew not a word of it. Catherine's dear friend and treasured director, Raimondo, acted as translator, transferring Catherine's comments into Latin. Of her new friend, Pope Gregory, she requested peace for Florence, that Gregory return to Rome, and that he still keep the small flame of going forward with plans for the crusade burning, should this hope ever come to full flame. It is a fact that Gregory trusted and liked Catherine, so much so, that their personal destinies crisscross in their lives given for the Church.

We see Gregory carved in a certain greatness, especially in his humility and purity of heart, no small tribute for a French Pope, living in an atmosphere of opulence in the Papal apartments in Avignon. Gregory sincerely worked for peace, managing to forestall the great schism, wanting to engage the crusade and to bring the Papacy back

to Rome. We can say that in many ways Gregory and Catherine heard the beat of the same drum. This caused Catherine to write to Gregory with freedom, even giving him the nickname, "Babbo." For example, in a letter exhorting his return to Rome, she writes, "Let's go quickly, my dear Babbo, and fearlessly."¹²

Soon the day came when Catherine and a good number of her close friends actually set out for Avignon to plead for a lifting of the interdict on Florence. This effort largely failed. However, the overwhelming win was Gregory's decision and resolve to return the Papacy to Rome, he the Frenchman who had never set foot in the Eternal City! Historians will have their own opinion of Gregory. Truth to tell, though he vacillated in anguish and under pressure of a corrupt Papal court, he displayed no small amount of courage in leaving Avignon. His friend Catherine helped him over that impossible bridge with her constant call to bravery.

The Romans gave the Pope a good reception and welcome. However, the clamor for Florence to be free of the interdict got the wheels of discontent started throughout the Italian city states. Then Gregory made the terrible mistake of sending the wretched French legates to Florence and to the cities. These legates belittled and embattled them. Poor Gregory was caught in between the jaws of ills he could not change and ills he sought to change. When Catherine, now back in Siena, got wind of it, her letters poured forth in ever greater earnestness. These offered the comfort Gregory needed before his death which occurred soon after. He was never strong, and the outbursts and reactions from his imprudent moves proved too much for him. His last act was to lift the interdict over Florence, but it was too late to prevent the tragedy yet to come.

Urban VI succeeded Pope Gregory XI and was bent on reform. His intelligence and learning was equal to the best minds. Unfortunately, he approached his measures with incredible rudeness toward everyone, including and especially the Cardinals. Alice Curtayne captures the tone of it well when she writes: "The Cardinals became embittered by the insufferable edge of Urban's temper."¹³ This terrible attitude, which became increasingly worse, put the Pontiff at odds with literally everyone. The French Cardinals, accompanied by three Italian Cardinals, "solved" the problem by returning to France, and at Fondi, they elected Clement VII, which immediately set the tragic Western Schism in place. Catherine, Raimondo and the close friends with her in Rome, understood exactly what had happened. Urban had been elected in the proper manner. That he had problems of ill temper that escalated with the passage of time caused great concern. However, they had been in Avignon and in Rome for the entire process of the election of both Gregory and Urban, they knew all the details and that it was a true election. Actually Catherine could see the Schism coming, but the acid on the wound was seeing half the populous stand by one Pope and half by the other. The Master of the Dominican Order, Father Elias, sided with Clement. Much fighting, killing and bitter antagonism occurred on both sides.

Meanwhile, Catherine, in terrible and wrenching darkness of faith, wrote to Urban. She visited him. She who had lost every dream, the peace between the Italian cities, the crusade, the solid papacy in Rome, it was she who extended allegiance, assistance and friendship to a Pope whose mind was deteriorating. Who will stand up for you, Urban, against your enemies: A true friend, a Catherine Benincasa. It's easy to love and befriend the brave and the best. But who will befriend the downcast? Who will uplift the desperate? Who will defend the Teccas, the Niccolòs and the Urbans?

Catherine's Legacy of Friends and Friendship

History tells us that Catherine, sick, frail and spent, died on 29th April. However, we need not see this as the finishing point, but only as the beginning. She passes the torch of friendship and fellowship on to us after the example of Jesus, who passed the commandment to love to his disciples, who in turn passed it on to the ages.

Through her example, Catherine teaches us that friendship is a virtue, and not an optional one. Life is a garden that must be cultivated in order to yield a plentiful bounty. If we do not cultivate friendships on every level, the garden of life is sterile. In her truly inspired work, *The Dialogue*, Catherine writes, "The virtues give the soul an adornment and dignity beyond the simple beauty that is hers from the beginning when I [God] created her in my image and likeness."¹⁴ We grow in grace. Friendships assist us in the process. Without them we limp along. We see how each friend of Catherine's complemented something in her, either her humor and gaiety, or her resolve, or her generosity, or her love, or her determination, or her gratitude. The adornment and growth simply never stopped. In all this, Catherine grew in her humanity. It is a very beautiful thing to see her flourish as a human being, loved and giving love through the friends she cultivated all through her life.

Let Catherine speak once more in one of her letters written to two of her friends while she was in Rocca d'Orcia:

...I want you to understand that we can neither love God nor be virtuous without the mediation of our neighbors, because it is in our neighbors that we find love and virtue. How so? I'll tell you. I can't show my Creator my love for him directly, because I can be of no service to God. So I have to use God's creatures as intermediaries, and do for them the service I cannot do for God. ...Keep in mind that this virtue is discovered and acquired in love for our neighbors, by loving friends and enemies alike for the sake of Christ crucified, by putting out the fire of anger and hatred we have harbored against our brothers and sisters.¹⁵

¹ John 13:34

² Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 58).

³ Alice Curtayne, *Saint Catherine of Siena* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc, 1980), 16, 17, 18).

⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁹ Ibid., 74.

¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹¹ Ibid., 98

¹² Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, Vol. II, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 217.

¹³ Ibid., Curtayne, 142.

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA AND ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO

Sister Mary Agnes, O.P.
Lufkin, TX

An article about St. Catherine of Siena, fourteenth century Dominican tertiary, and her love for St. Agnes of Montepulciano, Dominican nun of the thirteenth century, seems timely in this year marking the eighth centenary of the founding of the nuns by St. Dominic in Prouilhe, France. St. Agnes of Montepulciano is one of the early nuns in our Order and one who is not well known in the Church. All Catholics and most Christians know about St. Agnes, the child martyr, but few know much about the Dominican St. Agnes, and even we nuns know precious little.

Although St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes of Montepulciano never met on planet earth (Agnes lived 1268-1317 and Catherine 1347-1380), they enjoyed a loving, sisterly friendship. This is very evident in the visits St. Catherine made to the Monastery of St. Agnes in Montepulciano and the letters she wrote to the prioress and a nun there. St. Catherine loved to go to the Monastery and experience the peace and quiet of the cloister in the midst of her busy apostolic life.

Like St. Catherine, St. Agnes too had matured at an early age. When nine years old she took the habit of the Augustinians but later became a Dominican as a result of her dream in which she saw three ships: Augustinian, Franciscan, and Dominican. An angel advised her to enter St. Dominic's ship.¹

St. Catherine's deep devotion to St. Agnes and great love for the contemplative cloistered life was probably due to hearing about St. Agnes from Blessed Raymond of Capua, O.P., who wrote the life of the saint. The Monastery of St. Agnes at that time was still full of memories of her. Catherine's admiration of the contemplative life also probably stemmed from the time she lived as a recluse in her own father's house.

We Dominicans are familiar with the story of St. Catherine going to Montepulciano to venerate St. Agnes's body. Here, when she was in prayer, as St. Catherine bent down to kiss her foot, Agnes prevented her from stooping by raising her foot, as a sign of affection. At a later visit, when Catherine brought her niece as a novice to the Monastery, a shower as of manna fell from the ceiling of the chapel upon the body of St. Agnes and Catherine praying beside it which covered them both, making their habits all white with its snowy flakes which were all tiny crosses.

One day when St. Catherine was rapt in spirit, she beheld Agnes seated on a lofty throne of most beautiful light and an empty throne beside her, which was reserved for a soul of equal merit. A humble desire of knowing for whom that vacant seat was prepared made Catherine beseech the Lord to signify it to her, and she understood that she herself was to reign in Heaven in equal glory with Agnes. On one of the frescoes in the convent one can see two golden chairs, standing side by side in heaven, prepared for Agnes and Catherine. This vision increased the tender devotion Catherine had long felt for her saintly sister in religion.

In *The Dialogue* the eternal Father tells Catherine how ardent was the light of faith and how firm the hope of Agnes and how he provides for the poor:

I provide for the poor, and for their poverty they will be given the greatest of riches. ...Sometimes I provide by multiplying a little bit of something that would never have been enough, as you know I did for that gentle virgin St. Agnes. From her childhood right up to the end she never had any hesitation concerning herself or her family. So with her lively faith, at the command of Mary this poor young thing without any temporal goods began to establish a monastery. You know that the place had been a brothel. She didn't think, "How will I be able to do this?" But with my Providence she quickly made it a holy place, a monastery for religious. There in the beginning she had eighteen young virgins, though she had nothing unless I would provide.²

I think many of our monasteries can give witness to the same trust in Divine Providence during foundation days.

St. Catherine took a keen interest in the nuns and wanted them to be all they promised their Lord to be by their religious profession. She even founded a monastery in Belcaro outside Siena. The Belcaro castle was given to her by a man named Sir Vanni who turned his life around through Catherine's words and exhortations. His gift fulfilled one of her dearest wishes that she might establish a monastery of Dominican nuns at Belcaro. She obtained the Pope's permission for its foundation and the monastery was named "Our Lady of the Angels."

Catherine wrote a letter to one of the nuns in Montepulciano saying in part:

I am writing to you in the Precious Blood of God's Son, longing for you to be a true bride consecrated to your bridegroom and adorned with virtue. You know, my dearest daughter, that a bride dresses up and adorns herself when she presents herself to her bridegroom. [A Sienese bride's wedding dress was customarily scarlet. Thus Catherine's imagery of wedding garment and charity and Christ's redeeming blood come together. SN] This is what I want you to do: I want you to have within you the garment of charity, without which you could not go to the wedding....See to it that you are a faithful bride. And do you know when you will be faithful to your bridegroom? When you love no one and nothing but him. So I want nothing to be found in your heart but God. Empty it of any selfish and sensual love for your relatives or for anything else at all....Keep living in God's holy and tender love. May Christ, sweet Jesus, strengthen you.³

In another letter to contemplative nuns St. Catherine emphasized enclosure, humility, poverty and especially obedience. Regarding enclosure she wrote:

I long to see you hidden and enclosed in the side of Christ Crucified. Otherwise it would be useless to be enclosed within convent walls; in fact it would be like being in a prison. So just as you are enclosed physically let your affection and desire be securely enclosed and turned away from worldly ambition and pleasure to follow your Bridegroom Christ gentle Jesus....Do you know what oath your Bridegroom walked? One of freely chosen poverty and obedience. Out of humility, supreme exaltedness descended to the

lowliness of our humanity. Because of that humility and his ineffable love for us he gave up his humanity to the shameful death of the cross....You are to imitate that humility. But it cannot be achieved except through genuine self-knowledge and by contemplating the deep humility and meekness of the lamb who was slain in such blazing love.⁴

Christ expresses through Catherine the great value of the trials of temptation and darkness: "Often I withdraw into myself your feelings, but not grace...You know that the soul cannot be perfected except on the two wings of charity and humility. Now humility she learns through self-knowledge to which she comes in times of darkness. And charity is gained by seeing that in love I have sustained a good and holy will in her...Reflect...that unless you were from time to time enticed by temptation, you would become very careless and give up the practice of continual desire and prayer."⁵

He is your way, for just as he walked the way of the Cross, so you and everyone else must follow him, suffering every sort of pain...for love of him, spreading your sail on this tree, Christ Crucified – I mean the sail of love and the power of desire with constant prayer. This prayer is a deliverer and a fetcher.

I've been reflecting that those who do all that I've been talking about are completely freed from pain and stay peaceful and calm, and this is why I told you that I long to see you stripped of selfish sensual love and clothed in this royal garment, in the abyss of the eternal King's charity. Then you will be freed from the pain of obedience...you will live in peace and calm, experiencing God through grace, so that in the end you will receive the eternal vision of God. There all pain is finished. There we receive the fruit of virtue, the fruit that issues from our labors.⁶

There is much more in the letters of St. Catherine which reveal her deep admiration of St. Agnes and the contemplative life. I have given glimpses from the letters which I hope will re-awaken your desire to read them in their entirety and to follow these two great women more closely in their path of holiness.

May both saints intercede for us today as we strive to be faithful to our Dominican contemplative way of life in this eighth centenary of our foundation in Prouilhe, France.

¹ Johannes Jorgensen, O.P., *Life of St. Catherine of Siena* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co.: 1938)

² St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1980), 312-315.

³ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 2. trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), Letter T54 / G160, 274-5.

⁴ St. Catherine, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 1, trans Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1988), Letter 62, 196-197.

⁵ St Catherine, *The Letters*, Vol. 2, Letter T221 / G152, 182-183.

⁶ St. Catherine, *The Letters*, Vol. 2, Letter T220 / G155, 450.

THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS

Michał Sieykowski, O.P.
Translated from the Polish by Matthew Rzekczowski, OP.
Washington, D.C.

Excerpts from the book *Świątynia Pańska* (1743) by Michał Sieykowski, O.P., as edited by Jacek Salij, OP, in *Legendy Dominkańskie*, (Poznań: W Drodze, 1985), 193-201. In this book, Father Salij compiles many original texts about Dominican Saints and Blesseds, translates from Latin when necessary, and provides a brief introduction to each chapter. Because of the similarity in style between these vignettes and *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, Father Salij borrows the title "Little Flowers".

Since the texts below speak for themselves, we will limit ourselves to a few words about the female branches of the Order of St. Dominic. It was probably from the Albigensians that St. Dominic drew the idea of engaging women in the apostolate, first of all relying on their support for the work of the priests by special prayer but also [asking them] to educate girls. This was especially the case in his giving Albigensian women who had converted back to Catholicism (but who formerly had been ardent propagators of the sect) the opportunity to offer their own experience and spiritual energy to the service of the Catholic faith. The Dominican Nuns were founded in the years 1206-1211, that is in those years when St. Dominic along with his companions undoubtedly had no thought of establishing a male religious order but simply constituted a group of preachers striving to stop the expansion of the neo-Manichean sects. The first branch of nuns (so-called the Second Order) ultimately took shape as a strictly contemplative order. In Poland there are three monasteries of contemplative Dominican nuns, namely, in Krakow and at St. Ann's near Radom, and the third was recently founded at Radonie near Warsaw.

Much more numerous are the active Dominican Sisters (the so-called Third Order Regular, not to be confused with the Third Order for the Laity). There are a number of these groups of sisters, independent from one another. Depending on the specific charism of the religious group, their aim is the works of mercy, educational work, or missionary work. In Poland there are two groups of active Dominican Sisters. The first group, oriented principally to educational work and the works of mercy, was founded in 1861 by Mother Columba Białecka. Their motherhouse used to be at Biała Niżna in the province of Nowy Sącz, but is now in Kraków. The second group, founded in 1932 by Fr. Jacek Woroniecki, O.P., are missionaries; their headquarters are at Zielonka near Warsaw.

The texts below are taken from Fr. Michał Sieykowski's book *Świątynia Pańska* [*The Lord's Temple*], published in Kraków in 1743. They are selected from hundreds of little biographies preserved in the tradition of this order of saintly sisters. The biographies constitute the largest part of Fr. Sieykowski's book (pages 79-304).

YOU CAN'T OFFER JUST ANY ROSE TO THE LORD JESUS

Sister Franciszka Wakchina led a life of devotion. Once out of parental concern over her having distractions at prayer, our Lady Mary appeared to her with roses: some beautiful and fragrant, others ugly and withered. The beautiful ones represented liturgies with attentiveness given to God, the dried out those with distractedness. She begged the Most Holy Mary to instruct her how those withered roses might become fresh again. Mary answered her, "Say three prayers to the penitent St. [Mary] Magdalene. Through my intercession, she will compensate for your coldness." When she had taught [her] this, the roses transformed themselves into fresh ones. And Mary said, "I am going right away; we will deliver your prayers to my Son."

THE MIRROR SHOWED THE TRUTH

Blessed Villana of Florence [Villana de Botti, d. 1360] was a laywoman, who took a liking to rich and fancy clothes. She once placed herself in front of a mirror and saw that her crests had been turned into antlers, her curled hair into a snake, her ribbons into vermin, and her pearls into toads. Frightened by this vision, she tore everything off. Turning her back on the world, Villana adopted the habit of St. Dominic and did penance for her past excesses with great mortifications. Later she died in great holiness.

JESUS HIMSELF TILLED THE GARDEN OF HER SOUL

Sister Dorothy of Ferrara never spoke except when she spoke to her neighbor about God or spoke with God in prayer. Once at Easter time she was conversing with her sisters about the Lord Jesus, about how he showed himself as a gardener to St. [Mary] Magdalene. As she pined for the Lord, she received the grace [to see] the Lord Jesus stand before her as the handsome Gardener of Eden (though the other sisters never saw Him), and this filled her heart with great joy.

WHAT SORT OF BETROTHED WOMAN LOVES LITTLE

Sister Domitilla, though she received the habit of St. Dominic in her childhood years, did not live as a nun should. The Lord Jesus admonished her to [adopt] the religious life in this way: He showed her a dead relative who said to her with a stern look, "And you are the betrothed of Jesus but you don't love him? Mend your ways, or else you will be condemned forever." Frightened by this, she amended her life and lived with great mortifications, fasts, and self-denial.

BETTER TO KISS THE CRUCIFIED THAN TO DEFEND ONESELF AGAINST SLANDER

Sister Sigismunda was confronted, accused, and punished although she was innocent. When she prayed and complained to the Lord Jesus that she was innocent, the Lord Jesus responded to her three times from the cross, "Listen but remain silent, listen but remain silent, listen but remain silent." Comforted by this, she kept strict silence until her death and would not respond to any abuse. Her lips were placed upon the crucified Lord Jesus, and with her hands she offered her soul to God.

THE JOYFUL DEATH OF A RELIGIOUS

Blessed Clara Gambacorta, a woman of a senatorial family, became a religious of St. Francis, but then a Dominican by divine revelation and lived with great saintliness. When she was dying, the sisters by her side were crying, but she surrendered her soul to God smiling. Her face, which had been blackened by penance, turned lovely; her flesh gave forth the fragrance of paradise. In the Office of the Dead, the sisters were unable to say "Eternal rest..." but had to finish with the happy verse, "Glory to the Father and to the Son...." One pious person saw her soul brighter than the sun amidst angels in a great light, with a costly crown and on her arm a cross of precious stones.

PENANCE DEEPENS LOVE

Sister Lucy of Soncino, charmingly beautiful from her youth, was entirely worldly. But then she heard a sermon on the vanity of the world by the blessed Dominican Matthew [Carrieri] of Mantua, who converted many to repentance. She weighed these words of the divine sage: *Fallax gratia et vana est pulchritudo, mulier timens Deum ipsa laudabitur* (Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised) [Prov 31:30],¹ and she was converted to God. Having renounced all frivolity and having confessed to the above mentioned preacher, with the permission of her husband she took the habit of a tertiary of St. Dominic for the greater perfection of her soul. From the day of her conversion and taking the habit, she never ate meat but contented herself with herbs and light dishes and often fasted on bread and water. She lived through three Lents without any meals, often nourishing her soul with just the Most Holy Sacrament; she was full of the works of mercy; she prayed very long in church, visited the sick, helped the dying and prayed for them; she cheered convicts sentenced to death, admonishing them to offer their death and shame for their own sins. She cheered the sorrowful and directed erring sinners onto the road to perfection with such spirit and prudence that she turned many back to repentance.

A MEMORABLE VESTITION IN RACIBÓRZ

Blessed Euphemia Domitilla, a Polish woman, the daughter of Leszek, duke of Racibórz, came from the blood [line] of the Polish kings. From her youth, she dedicated her chastity to the Lord God, adorned her youthful years with countless virtues, practiced fervent prayer and meditation, and day and night before the crucifix pondered the innocent suffering of her Savior. A girl of great innocence, when she reached her twelfth year the duke of Braunschweig asked her father for her hand in marriage. But she would not permit it, giving notice that she was already espoused to Christ, the handsomest and richest fiancé of all. She took the habit of the Second [Order] of St. Dominic at the Monastery of the Most Holy Spirit in Racibórz. [Just before] this vestition, the Dove was manifested, whiter than snow, descending in three rays upon the church of the Holy Spirit. Also, at the Holy Mass, after which (according to custom) she was vested, from the Elevation of the Most Holy Sacrament to Holy Communion, angelic music with an indescribable melody was heard in the air, not only by her but also by others present, music which would express the angels' joy over this girl, who was surrendering herself to the Order in service to her Betrothed.²

AS IF SHE DID NOT EVEN FEEL THE HOT IRON

Sister Beatrice Mariz, of the Second Order monastery of St. Catherine in Evora [Portugal], was humble, abstemious, and above all abounding in the virtue of charity. Through fervent prayer she desired with all her heart to shed her blood as a martyr for the name of Jesus. The Lord Jesus heard [her prayer] and granted that as prioress, out of love for her neighbor, she would serve a sister who had succumbed to a serious and infectious disease and that from her she would become infected herself. When she wanted to be cured of this disease, she summoned doctors, who applied to her arm glowing iron and hot bullets as a cure. She bore this patiently. In her other hand she held Jesus crucified, fixed her eyes upon him, and mindful of his sufferings forgot her own. Throughout this painful and difficult medical treatment, she did not open her mouth or complain.

When asked how could she be so patient and endure such great suffering, she answered that meditating on the sufferings of Christ (who in the midst of his cruel passion did not open his mouth) her own sufferings seemed like nothing to her. Persevering in this steadfastness and concentration on God, in a short time, because the illness was so difficult, she departed on the 22nd of August, the year of Our Lord 1595, for the eternal and flawless consolation of delighting in her Bridegroom

A ROSARY TURNED INTO A BOUQUET OF ROSES

Sister Cecilia of Feraz [?] was so pure and innocent that she didn't even know what it was to commit a mortal sin. With the rosary devotion she venerated our most holy Lady Mary, and she merited that after her death there appeared on her beads lovely roses, from which a gracious fragrance came.

MARTHA CAN BE CLOSER TO THE LORD THAN MARY

Sisters Magdalene and Martha of the monastery at Santarem [Portugal]. One was doing the duties of a Martha, spending time with lowly chores in the house and the kitchen and serving the sick; the other remained in divine contemplation all the time, day and night, after the example of the Magdalene, choosing that [better] part at the feet of Jesus crucified. One time Sister Martha came running to choir for a light for a certain sick sister and found Sister Magdalene there in tears at the feet of Jesus crucified. They were both happy with their holy and pious deeds, the one with her service and the other for remaining with her prayers, when they both heard a voice from the mouth of the crucifix, approving both their holy deeds. Nevertheless, the crucifix told them of a difference: that although he was pleased with both their fasts, still he had a greater liking for the work and service which Martha, out of love for her neighbor, showed the sick sister than for Magdalene's unceasing prayer at his feet. And on that very day, July 5th, both of them finished the course of their lives and went to heaven as a reward for their merits.

THE MARTYRDOM OF IRISH DOMINICAN SISTERS

Sister Honoria of Burke, a city in the province of Lower Connaught on the isle of Hibernia, was the daughter of Richard, a nobleman from a family of Danists[?]. In her fourteenth year she offered her maidenhood to her Bridegroom Christ, confirming this by a vow made at

the hands of Fr. Thaddeus Duane, provincial of the Irish Dominicans, from whom she also received the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic. Nevertheless, she built for herself a cottage near the monastery and lived there with her servant and her companion, who was also named Honoria and came from the MaGaen family. They lived there for a long while during the times of the indecent Queen Elizabeth and the reigns of James and Charles, kings of England and lords of the isle of Hibernia.

When she had grown old, during the last persecution incited against the Catholics by the godless tyrant Cromwell, religious were dispersed and killed, and [this] convent was demolished. She and her companions had to escape from the godless tyranny to a nearby island, and there on that [piece of] land she hid for several days. But soon all three were discovered, taken prisoner by the heretics, and bound together, suffering great persecution. Sr. Honoria MaGaen, young and fair, having [already] received heavy blows from [their] boorishness and fearing some kind of coercion and assault on her maidenhood, asked Jesus, her Bridegroom, that she might be exempted from that danger. She was heard by him and miraculously escaped from those bonds in the nude to a nearby grove and hid herself in [the trunk of] a rotted tree. She died in February from hunger and deep frost, and she was dispatched with a pure soul to the paradise of bliss, to her Bridegroom.

But the other Sister, Honoria of Burke, was led away naked and ruthlessly beaten by those dissolute soldiers and torturers, and when they saw that she was numb from the cold, they took her like a bundle of wood and threw her onto a barge (which was to cross the lake) with such force that she shattered three ribs. Arriving at the shore, seeing that she was already half-dead and dying, they left her and her servant. [Honoria died there, but the servant lived to tell the tale.]

THE ANGELS DEFENDED HER FROM ATTACK

Her brother and her bachelor uncle were so disturbed that Columba [of Rieti, +1501] sedately refused to agree to their plans for her marriage that they had it in for her and began to think about her death. One time when Columba was leaving church, this same brother (filled with anger) together with the uncle and another bad companion were lying in ambush for her at a certain spot and struck the holy girl. But they saw that Columba was surrounded by a troop of angels, in the midst of which was also St. Dominic, and he began to threaten them harshly, saying "You lions on the prowl, what do you have against this lamb dedicated to me? You ravens from hell and hawks on the prey, what do you have against this heavenly dove? She should not be subjected to your attack." Hearing and seeing this, their hearts were softened, and they did not dare to harass the blessed girl any longer.

THE ROSES OF SISTER MARGARET

Sister Margaret Fontani, a Third Order sister from Modena, spurned the world and took different means to preserve the virtues of her innocence and mortify her flesh: not sleeping except for [lying] a little while on bare boards, and thus remaining at prayer during the night, doing harsh penances, fasting for many weeks during the year – so that by these mortifications she might please God and earn [a place in] heaven. God showed the holiness of his pious handmaid by many miracles, particularly by an act of charity towards her neighbor. For while she was staying at home with her own brother, who lived well, she secretly gave alms to the poor before he [would], and a miraculous thing happened to her.

Once there was a great famine in Modena, and because of it the poor were dying. Seeing the abundance of food at her brother's and hearing the advice of Tobias: *Si multum tibi fuerit, abundanter tribue* (If you have much, give alms out of your abundance) [Tob 4:9], one day during Christmas week she secretly took many rolls of bread and distributed them to the poor. Her brother stopped her and asked her what she was carrying in her bundle. Being afraid of him, she answered him with great simplicity that it was roses (because in God's eyes alms and deeds of mercy are like fragrant flowers). Curious to see if this were true, her brother asked her to show him these roses. Whereupon God in his omnipotence brought it about that the slices of bread and other fragments were transformed into fragrant and fresh roses, [even though] it was winter. Seeing this, Margaret's brother was astounded and asked how did it come about that during [the time of] the cold northeast winds she had such graceful flowers. She answered how it was that God in his mercy brought this about: "If you, my brother, would only be merciful in giving alms from the bread, which he gave you in such conspicuous abundance..." With these words the devout servant brought her brother to give alms generously, for he not only gave out enough food himself but he also allowed Margaret to take what was needed for the poor.

Many thanks to Grzegorz Mazur, OP, for his corrections. Advent, 2005.

¹ The Biblical translations are taken from the NAB, 1971.

² In a footnote, Fr. Salij adds the following: Ofka Piastówna (+1359), a saintly Dominican nun from Racibórz. To this day she enjoys an active cult in Upper Silesia, especially in her home city and is one of the Polish candidates for canonization.

SIMON

I once had all the answers
safely nested away.
I once knew who I was
and the path I was to take.
Why, then, did I pause to look?
Why interrupt the evenness my life had become,
the status quo that beat
so steadily and assuredly
in the hollow where my heart
was to have been?
But for my curiosity
the answers would still be mine.
One casual glance erased forever
those easy, formulaic solutions
And chanced to rest on the face
that now gives me no rest.
Streaked and stricken,
it haunts me still with its unspeakable
pain and sorrow born of a love
I did not then and cannot yet
fathom.
Yoked with him beneath the wood
I looked into his eyes
And all my answers were lost, forever drowned
in that cup where taking dies
and giving is eternally reborn.
No, it was not my choice
and he was not my Lord.
But I shouldered his yoke
and trod in his steps,
Leaving behind my tidy nest of answers
and the self I knew
To become forever
His.

Sister Maria Simona, O.P.
Lufkin, TX

REVISITING FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Tuning Our Minds to Our Voices

Sister Mary Magdalen Braun, O.P.
Farmington Hills, MI

A verse from one of the hymns sometimes sung at Vespers or Compline has a power to evoke before our minds a vast panorama of worship:

*As o'er each continent and island,
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.*

In the verse before it we sing:

*We thank thee that thy Church unsleeping
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day or night.*

"The Day Thou Gavest Lord" Worship Hymnal II, 263

The words evoke a kind of mystical vision of one aspect of the universe: wave after wave of praise and prayer sweeping successively and unceasingly across our globe, giving glory to our Creator and Savior.

The Sacred Scriptures set the example and norm for this. How many times they direct us to survey the universe with praise on our lips in words such as those of the Psalmist: Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth (Ps 100). ...Praise the Lord from the heavens ...praise him all his angels ... praise him sun and moon ... praise him shining stars. ...Praise the Lord from the earth ...sea creatures ...mountains, hills, trees, beasts, birds... all earth's kings and peoples (Ps 148).

Amid this vast sea of praise we begin each day as a community with a call for God's help: "O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise." And at the beginning of the other hours of the day's Office: "O God come to my assistance; Lord make haste to help me." It is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the words of this our call for help in our littleness. He knows so well our weakness in the face of the demands of this Office of prayer. The work is so great; I am so small! "Open my lips; come to my assistance; make haste!" Our call for help, repeated at each celebration, brings us as well as him to attention. Brief though it is, it becomes a moment to recollect ourselves in awe at the thought of what we are about to do...and to draw close to him in dependence on his help.

This global vision of the far reaches of the Church's Prayer is given a further nuance in the opening invitation of the first Hour of each day's Office. After we have asked the Lord to be present and open our lips, we call out to our brothers and sisters everywhere on the earth and to the whole universe to be present with us: "Come", we sing out in the words of the Invitatory. "Come!" "Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the rock who saves us" -- "Come let us worship the Lord our maker" ... "Come let us worship the King of martyrs", "Christ the chief shepherd of the flock". "Come let us adore the fount of all wisdom"... "the Lamb with the virgins who followed him" ... "let us worship God, wonderful in his saints." Come, come everybody on the earth, let us worship. Oh, come! That brief word

“come” embraces a wealth of meaning. It brings into focus our priestly role in the Church through our offering of the “sacrifice of praise”. With only a few exceptions, that imperative call is there every day to remind us that our prayer and our very life are not for ourselves alone. We extend our “Come” to gather around us our brothers and sisters everywhere, with all their needs and desires, their hopes and their fears, their sinfulness and their beauty. And as we bow down in the repeated “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit” throughout the Office, we enfold them, so that they are bowing down together with us.

We find what we might term the *official* description of the Liturgy of the Hours in The Catechism of the Catholic Church: There we read in # 1174:

The mystery of Christ, his Incarnation and Passover which we celebrate in the Eucharist ...permeates and transfigures the time of each day through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, “the Divine Office.” This celebration, faithful to the apostolic exhortations to “pray constantly” is ‘so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God (Sacrosanctum concilium 84). In this “public prayer of the Church” (SC 98), the faithful (clergy, religious, and lay people) exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. Celebrated in ‘the form approved by the Church’ the Liturgy of the Hours is “truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father” (SC 84).

We linger on this description in order to reflect with greater awareness on how this vision of prayer and praise envelopes our whole life through our answering the call to be a nun in the Order of Preachers. Love for the Divine Office is in our bloodstream as an inheritance from St. Dominic. No need to spend time proving his zeal for its wholehearted rendition by the friars! -- As far as the nuns are concerned, it is curious that both the very first Constitutions of the Nuns as well as the Constitutions of Montargis on which Humbert of Romans based his definitive edition begin with regulations regarding the celebration of the Office. That tells us something about the importance attached to it, and the regard for its proper celebration held by our earliest nun-forebears.

Beyond what profession as a nun of the Order carries with it of love for the choral rendition of the Office, we are confirmed in our appreciation of its sacredness and nobility by the words of the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours:

When a person prays the Liturgy of the Hours, he is saying the Psalms, not just in his own name, but truly in the name of the whole Church ...in fact praying in the name of Christ himself (#108).

Reminding ourselves of this, automatically helps focus our attention as we prepare to sing each hour of the Office when it comes in turn to sanctify the course of the day.

Even only a brief survey of the history of the Office gives us a greater realization of the worship of God’s people through the ages into which our life is inserted. In that vast scene of worship it is our privilege to have been eternally predestined by God to be women “appointed for the work of divine praise” so that “the solemn celebration of the liturgy is the heart of our whole life and the chief source of its unity” (LCM 75).

We all know that its origins and meaning and purpose have sources that precede the Christian era. There is its Israelite background and roots reaching back to Moses with prescribed times, and even the prayers themselves, embedded in the daily life of the Chosen People. --. At sunrise and toward the closing of the day, faithfully they paused in the presence of the Lord with ritual prayers of praise and of blessing, keeping themselves aware of their covenant-relationship with him. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone* (Deut 6:4). *Blessed are you, O Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob, Lord of heaven and earth, our shield and the shield of our fathers.*

The Jews' remembrance of their covenant duty and inheritance guided them in their standing before God in two prescribed times of day: for the morning recitation of the *Shema* and for the Eighteen Benedictions of the evening. Here we have the idea of specified times of standing awarely in God's Presence, remembering one's duty to and dependence on him, and the blessings received from him. This contact with God was so much in the very fabric of the Jews' daily life that they would not even think of not making that contact. Jesus knew it thus in his everyday life.

In the fourth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel there are a few words in verse 16 that can furnish an intriguing picture of Jesus engaged in liturgy. The picture is relevant to our present subject and can lead us into union with him in a way we might not have thought about before. Luke writes: *He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day* (4:16). We are familiar with the incident: how Jesus stands to read and selects the text from Isaias. But rather than dwelling on the text from Isaias, let us look at the implications in the Evangelist's words telling us that Jesus went into the synagogue *according to his custom....* They allow us to picture Jesus, standing in choir as it were -- as he had stood according to custom for at least eighteen years preceding that moment, -- worshipping his Father in the obscurity of being simply one among his fellow townsmen engaged in the prescribed liturgical service of the day. *He emptied himself* to give us this model, too, and to give us an additional reason for deepening our grateful love for him. Reverently probing into his inner dispositions, and those of Mary and Joseph too, engaged in community worship can feed our fervor as we pray in the midst of our sisters in the daily routine of the Divine Office.

By the time of the New Testament writings we know that there were several other specific "hours" of prayer. We find the apostles observing them. The public prayers of the first Jewish-Christian converts would naturally have been a carry-over from the synagogue gatherings and the daily prayers at home as well as from the hours of worship in the Temple.

The ideal of "ceaseless prayer" -- of "praying constantly" -- is placed before the individual believer by Jesus in the Gospel, by St. Paul and in other writings of the New Testament period. But there are also indications of community liturgy: meetings of believers to pray together. Their precise organization -- outside of that for the Eucharist -- eludes our tracing the details, but some of the admonitions that St. Paul was obliged to give in their regard tell us that the participation was very much alive!

From the beginning, types and themes and texts from the Old Testament scriptures have formed part of Christian prayer. We, today, stand upon and prolong the tradition of a people that reaches very far back, indeed. We can even allow ourselves a mystic sense of companionship with our brothers and sisters who lived and worshipped in the ages of the patriarchs and prophets; we can stretch back to enter into what their experience might have been, and we can draw them into our enjoyment of the fulfillment of what they longed for.

Jesus would be our first and chief model in this union of prayer, gathering up as he does -- in himself -- the prayer of all the children of his Father. ... As our Constitutions put it: "...the nuns in union with Christ, glorify God for the eternal purpose of his will and the marvelous dispensation of grace" in a "joyful celebration [that] joins the pilgrim Church to the Church in glory" (LCM 75). What a tremendous vista of the meaning and chief responsibility of our vocation as nuns of the Order of Preachers.

In the early centuries of the Church we find evidence of several models that had an influence and to various degrees were formative of the Office as we have it today. Indeed, far from remaining static the evolution of God's daily public praise has continued over the centuries right down into our own lifetime. Entwined in this evolution the constants have always been there: readings from Scripture, praise and petition in a common assembly, song, and pause for silent meditation.

When tracing the early development of the liturgy, monastic people, such as we, are usually familiar with the picture of the early period that Cassian has left us of the fixed times for what we can call the Liturgy of the Hours of the desert monks in Egypt. The celebration is both stark and lengthy; the desert monks followed their own instinct in a style that matched the rest of their manner of life. We have read the description: night vigil of the whole body of monks, a single cantor rising to slowly recite the Psalms, usually twelve in number -- one by one -- while the listening monks are seated; meditating in silence. At a signal, they rise after each psalm, pray in silence with hands uplifted, then prostrate in worship. They rise at a prayer recited by the leader in the name of all, and then seat themselves for a repetition of the rite for each of the Psalms.

We have read this description often enough to have unconsciously concluded that this is how the pattern of the Liturgy of the Hours all began. But Cassian was writing at the beginning of the fifth century for the guidance of groups of monks in the Europe of his own time about what he had witnessed at the end of the fourth century. It had not all jumped into place and begun only then and there. While the monks of the desert were praying together thus, other believers had already been gathering at fixed times of the day to worship together. These had their own distinct patterns, manner and orientation for the sanctification of the hours of the day that were more congruent with urban life. We find them by the time of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen in the early third century when Christians were still living under threat of persecution -- a hundred years before peace came to the Church under Constantine.

Moving into the succeeding centuries the Liturgy of the Hours gradually flourished. Celebrated by the faithful in urban settings and more solemnly by canons in the great cathedrals it is joined to the monks in monasteries multiplied in both the East and the West. One example is the care given to its development by Charlemagne, and there is witness to this in the brief time-identification given in fine print in the margin of many of our Ordinary hymns at the Office. There we find reference to St. Ambrose and Prudentius in the late fourth century as well as composers of hymns in the seventh and ninth century. How many million worshippers of the past have sung these same hymns!

The period extending from the sixteenth century to our own time which includes Pope Pius V and the reform of the liturgy, has witnessed a certain solidification and, through the invention of the printing press, a new availability of the Office for all. We have to remind ourselves of what celebrating the Office must have been like before the breviary! But while the breviary has brought many advantages to the celebration, we have also to be on our

guard against losing the purpose and impact of such units as the short readings at most of the Hours with their response. For those who could only listen, the reading was nourishment from the Word for which they waited eagerly and to which they gratefully assented in a response ordinarily itself consisting of words from the Bible. On our part, we risk -- particularly at the lesser Hours -- rendering them in a way which limits our vision and spiritual profit.

The instinct to come together to pray, to meet God as a community is a testified reality of man's social life. While in the very beginning of the liturgy of the Church we find it connected with the Eucharist, it gradually developed structures outside the Eucharist.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states clearly that "...liturgical services pertain to the whole Body of the Church. They manifest it and have effects upon it (SC 26). The second sentence of that quotation says something to which we might give some renewed attention. It reminds us that liturgical services have effects, not only on those who participate in them but on the whole Body of the Church. The fact that what we are about to do affects the whole Church is something to think about as the signal for the Office summons us to come together, breaking into the course of our day over and over again, to draw us into, and become the prayer of all.

But the Council document also assures us that "The Divine Office ...is a source of piety and a nourishment for personal prayer." Further on, we read: "For this reason [those] who take part in the Divine Office are earnestly exhorted in the Lord to attune their minds to their voices when praying it. To achieve this more fully, they should take steps to improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the Psalms" (SC 90).

Most of us are not in need of a great deal of information about the Divine Office, after celebrating it every day for ten, twenty, forty, sixty years. But we do need to renew our attention to the fact that the liturgy is most intimately interwoven in the fabric of our vocation in life. As we have seen from various angles, we are entrusted in a special and public way to gathering up in ourselves, by the Church's commissioning, the worship of the whole people of God. Our Constitutions confirm this commission.

However tremendous may be the marvel of it, or our own limitations, we cannot change the fact that we are "appointed for the work of divine praise" and "to intercede with the Father of mercies for the universal church as well as for the needs and salvation of the whole world" (LCM 75). Whatever else may be involved in our call to Dominican contemplative life, this is pivotal. It is a case of seeing our life as one in which -- together with the Liturgy of the Eucharist -- the solemn celebration of the Office "is the heart of our whole life" (LCM 75). And consequently whatever else we do falls into place around it. This is a very subtle distinction, but a very important one for the ultimate integrity of our Dominican monastic contemplative life.

The very meaning of our existence is connected with this entrustment. It is a responsibility which involves duty, and often the sacrifice of our own personal pursuits, yes. But it is a sacred duty and -- above all -- it is a gift of love -- a love which re-echoes and joins with the love-gift of Christ for the world.

This paper was originally given in Farmington Hills Monastery as lecture on the Liturgy of the Hours presented in a series of "Study-Chapters" on various aspects of the Liturgy.

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD¹

Servais Pinckaers, O.P.
Translated by Sister Mary Thomas, OP.
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Introduction²

As we celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the foundation of the Order of Preachers by Saint Dominic, we recall the night of the "Seignadou" when the nuns came into being. What was Saint Dominic's intent for the women converts he gathered into the monastery of Blessed Mary of Prouihle in August, 1206? How would he later associate them with the holy preaching of his brethren, as yet existing only in the mind of God but destined to become the Order of Preachers?

In the Fundamental Constitution of the Nuns (1. II) the answer is clarion clear: "The nuns are to seek, ponder and call upon Him in solitude so that the word proceeding from the mouth of God may not return to him empty, but may accomplish those things for which it was sent (cf. Is 55:10)."

The Word proceeding from the mouth of God, center and purpose of the Order, is the heart of our vocation. It is significant that Father Servais Pinckaers, prestigious theologian of the Dominican University of Freiburg in Switzerland and inspiration of a whole new generation of Dominican Thomistic theologians, should provide a series of essays of a clearly pastoral nature for the simple laity living in the neighborhood of the University, and should call it *Hunger for the Gospel*. Out of this collection we have chosen a reflection on listening to the Word of God. Designed for "plain people" -- as Saint Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* was designed for "beginners" -- the disarming simplicity of Father Pinckaers' essay goes deep into the soil of the reader's mind and heart, *making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater*.

Sister Mary Thomas, O.P.
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* * * * *

In this day and age we can't get away with simply accepting and putting into practice the religious and moral teaching we received when we were young, without reflecting on it. On reaching the threshold of adulthood, we have to adapt the package received in childhood to our personal lifestyle, and for many this triggers a crisis. Today, Christian teaching and practice are subjected to so much criticism and revision that the Church is beginning to resemble a dilapidated house heading for ruin. People are not lacking who tell us the house, the old Church, is falling apart and no longer fit to live in. They opt for total reconstruction in line with today's tastes and needs.

Whoever we may be, we have all been affected by the general shake-up following the Council. We are forced to ask questions about the fundamentals of our faith and the basis of our Christian life. We need to find a foundation solid enough to build on.

But search as we may, we will never find any foundation firmer than the Word of the Lord. *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who*

built his house upon the rock (Mt 7: 24). Isaiah had already said: A voice says, 'Cry!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever (Is 40: 6-8).³

It is not enough to listen.

When I speak of listening to the Word of God, I mean giving it an attention that goes beyond listening and leads into action. We can't be content with lending an ear to God, the way we sit through a pleasant lecture or read a distracting novel. Authentic listening leads to action, and would be useless without it. *And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand (Mt 7: 26).*

A simple, direct listening to the Word of God is the first and absolute condition for everything that follows, just as the light that we perceive with our eyes directs all our movements. So learning how to listen is the first thing we must do. In our day, its importance is decisive.

Where is the Word of God?

It is not possible here to give a complete account of the various ways in which God speaks to us. I shall simply speak of Scripture, which is the principal form clothing the Word of God. Conformity to Scripture is the touchstone for every word that comes to us from God.

Scripture includes both Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is far from being properly appreciated by us and being viewed as God's word to us. At one time, it was believed that the Church forbade Catholics to read it. People came to think that the Old Testament was so far surpassed by the New that it no longer had any relevance for us. Up until the seventeenth century, however, reading and meditation on the entire Scripture had formed the basis of Christian teaching at all levels.

Today, the Church makes all of Scripture available to us and editions of the Bible have proliferated. But the approach to the Old Testament remains difficult, and many are turned off by a first reading of the Bible. They get lost, as it were, in a dense forest; they haven't explored this territory often enough to know its trails and paths.

As for the New Testament, which we think we know very well, rare are the people who have read any of its books in their entirety, or have perused them often enough to have acquired a taste for them as regular nourishment. We are used to hearing bits and pieces of the New Testament at Mass, taken out of context. This does not give us an adequate understanding of it. Yet these accounts and letters were addressed to Christians like us, or to pagans completely ignorant of the Jewish Scriptures. In spite of the cultural progress we are so proud of, have we become incapable of grasping the religious teaching lavished on Christians of two thousand years ago?

How should we approach Scripture?

What is the best way to approach Scripture, or the Gospels, which form the center and summit of the Bible? There is a method which I shall call primitive, and so basic that without it all introductions to Scripture would be useless, if not harmful. This method is nothing less than a simple, direct personal reading, one on one as it were, a little like reading a letter God has sent us, which speaks about him and about us. This reading ought to precede any commentary

(except for an introduction and the necessary rapid notes that will enable us to understand the text itself). In this way the text will begin, little by little, to speak to us, and touch us. Such a contact is indispensable and decisive. Nothing can take its place.

This method assumes that all Christians, whatever the degree of their culture, provided they have faith, possess an innate ability to read Scripture directly, as if it were a book written for them. Actually Scripture, especially the Gospels, is addressed to believers rather than to scholars. This means that every Christian possesses the capacity to grasp the kernel of the Gospel, the nourishing meat within the shell of words, the Word that will touch him, convert him, lead him along the road to God. Better still, this means that God can speak directly to the heart of everyone who reads and listens to the Gospel with faith. He reveals himself to them with the help of this text, as one person little by little reveals himself to another in an ongoing conversation.

In light of this, I should like to ask you: if God has truly spoken to us in his Scripture, do you think all we need to do is listen with a distracted ear to the two or three readings at Sunday Mass? If the Lord has spoken to us, is it not because he has something essential to tell us, that will interest us personally? If he has taken the pains to send us his Son, is it not because the message is vital? Should not listening to the Word of God, therefore, be our priority? Take the Gospel in hand. Here is a letter God sends you in friendship, today. Let no person, no pretext, stop you from listening to this Word, from joining in this intimate conversation. Have no fear; when God wants to talk with you, you don't need to know a foreign language, or have a degree in special studies, nor does anyone have to explain it all to you. It's enough that God opens his mouth and we open our minds and hearts to him in faith. Through this small opening of faith and hearing, all the wisdom of God can penetrate us. We are given a knowledge and experience on a different level than human science.

Pick up the Gospel. It is written for *you* -- for you, and at the same time for the whole Church. Think of it as your most precious treasure, a treasure that speaks, that gives life. Do not allow anyone, or any specious reasoning, or any difficulty you may encounter, to take it out of your hands. *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field* (Mt 13:44).

Becoming adults in the Church

People talk a great deal today about adult Christianity, and some seem to think it's enough to be living after Vatican II and to take part in the current movement of contestation, to become an adult in the faith. To my mind, no one can presume to have acquired maturity in the Christian faith, without having made the Gospel --the Evangelists, Peter, Paul --his daily bread. As Jesus put it, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* (Mt 4:4). To develop a taste for the Gospel as the nourishment we consume by reading, chew by reflection and prayer, and assimilate by life and practice, this is the condition for attaining to *the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" of which St. Paul speaks (Eph 4:13).

The Council highlighted the Church as the People of God. Various organizations such as Pastoral Councils, Parish Councils and so forth have tried to draw the laity into a more active participation in the life and development of the Church. However, we do not fully deserve the name of the People of God, and we cannot take part effectively in the building up of the Church in the world, unless we have first silenced our own human ideas and words so as to listen in

silence to the Word of the Gospel. That Word alone has the power to lay the foundations and build up the Church in spite of all human weaknesses.

Let us read the Gospel

You can judge from this the importance of a simple, direct, personal reading of the Gospel. Throughout, it is God himself, our Father, who is speaking to us. We should read in faith, following the Church's understanding and teaching. In humility too, for if we have learned some truth in God's school, it's no reason for us to think we've suddenly become masters in Israel, and can now interpret the whole Gospel for ourselves and impose our view on others.

Let us then read the Gospel with direct simplicity, as we would listen to someone speaking to us. We should not allow a lack of scientific knowledge to stop us: we can remedy that later. Scripture commentaries are useful for those who are already familiar with the text and who have found substantial nourishment in it. If we read commentaries before we have made a personal discovery of Scripture, they can become a screen blocking the light, an obstacle giving us the idea that Scripture is only for specialists. The knowledge the Gospels convey to us is on a different plane -- that of realities learned through experience. No book, no science of the schools, no reasoning can teach us directly how to love, to hope, to be sincere, courageous. These things, of the greatest value, can only be acquired by a wholly personal movement, and by example too, which passes them from one person to another. Understanding of the Gospel is on this level, if not a higher one, for who could teach us to believe, to hope in God, to love him, if not God himself, when he touches us through his Word?

The Word of God penetrating our lives engenders in us the experience of the very realities of which it speaks. This gives us a deeper understanding than we could gain from all other teachers and books. As a corroboration of this, let me quote a passage from a classic I warmly recommend to you, the *Conferences* of Cassian. He is speaking about the prayer of the Psalms:

Sacred Scripture is clearer, and its inner core reveals itself to us when our experience not only perceives but anticipates its thought, and the meanings of the words are disclosed to us less by exegesis than by our own experience. When we have the same disposition in our heart with which each psalm was originally sung or composed, then we become like its author, grasping its significance beforehand rather than afterward. That is, we first take in the power of what is said, rather than the knowledge of it.... Having been taught by what we ourselves feel, we gain knowledge of the Psalms not through hearsay, but rather, we touch realities directly, having perceived them in our own depths as in a very clear mirror. From the inner disposition of our hearts we bring forth not what has been committed to memory but what is inborn in the very nature of things. Thus we penetrate the meaning of the Psalms not through the written text but with experience leading the way (Conference 10, n. 5).

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² Introduction by Sr. Mary Thomas, O.P., translator.

³ For Biblical quotations the Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version, 1957 has been used.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE TRINITY IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

Parts III and IV – Mark and John

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Part III: The Son of God in Mark's Gospel

My search for the Trinitarian mystery as put forth in the four Gospels has led me to examine Mark's Gospel with the specific intent of discovering in his version of the Good News a particularly meaningful portrait of Jesus as the Son of God. We know, of course, that all the Gospels, indeed the entire New Testament, focuses on Jesus as its subject. What is there, then, of particular note about Mark's Gospel? Is the quality of Sonship -- Jesus as Son of God -- prominent in Mark, as fatherhood was for Matthew and the Holy Spirit for Luke? And if so, how?

I found my excursion through Mark's Gospel more difficult than those made earlier through Matthew and Luke. Mark's Gospel is very short and concise. There are no "special" passages in Mark to savor, such as the Sermon on the Mount or the Prodigal Son. I missed the early introductory chapters on the infancy of Jesus, so beautiful in themselves and setting the tone for the rest to follow. Mark's is the shortest of the Gospels. Moreover, almost all of Mark is repeated by either Matthew or Luke, if not both. There are only three small episodes -- two miracle stories and one parable -- that Mark has recorded that the other Synoptics have left aside. By contrast with these, Mark's Gospel seems stark, almost unfinished, in quality. It does not have the magnificent structure and solemnity of expression so evident in Matthew, nor the gentle restrained tones so characteristic of Luke.

Its style is somewhat haphazard and the quick succession of events leads me to think of it as "a Gospel of first impressions," a record of the immediate impact Jesus made on his contemporaries. Mark's Gospel is most likely the earliest and therefore the most primitive. In both Matthew and Luke, and even more so in John, we can discern a longer period of reflection. Mark has not had enough time to look back, as Matthew does, to the many foreshadowings of the mystery in the Old Testament. Nor does he look ahead to the future, as does Luke, anchoring our hope in the guiding presence of the Spirit. Mark's Gospel is direct and fresh in its approach. Here we come closest to the first gropings of the early Church to understand who Jesus was and perhaps to the very personality of Jesus himself.

Markan Simplicity

Mark does not elaborate. He gives us the bare minimum of facts. For example, he often tells us that Jesus preached but he offers few examples. There are no long discourses in Mark and only a sampling of the parables. We must wait for Matthew and Luke to delineate more clearly the content of what Jesus actually said. Again, Mark tells us that Jesus was tempted in the desert but it is Matthew and Luke who tell us how. We learn nothing of the childhood or youth of Jesus from Mark. Even the resurrection account is stripped to a statement of the empty tomb. Mark has only one point to make in his narrative and that is to manifest the Crucified Messiah. It is Jesus on the Cross who captures our attention first.

On the other hand, it is Mark who often gives us a wealth of small details omitted by the other Synoptics, making his account come alive, dynamically real. For example, in the cure of

the paralytic (2:1-12), only Mark spells out for us that the paralytic was carried by four men and that they stripped the roof and made an opening in it before lowering the stretcher in front of Jesus. In the multiplication of the loaves (6:30-44), only Mark of the Synoptics gives us the dialogue that ensued between Jesus and his disciples regarding the situation of the crowds and what was to be done about it. John, of course, goes further and tells us that Jesus initiated the conversation and names Philip and Andrew as his interlocutors (Jn 6:5-10). But this penetrating glance into the person of Jesus was important for the first of the evangelists too.

Mark brings us into contact with the human side of Jesus. He does not hesitate to describe the human sentiments of Jesus omitted by Matthew and Luke. In the story of the cure of the leper, only Mark tells us that *Jesus felt sorry for him* (1:41). Only Mark gives an instance of Jesus giving a *stern* warning (1:43), and of experiencing *grief and anger* (3:5). Both Mark and Luke give us the story of the widow's mite. However, Luke limits himself to saying that Jesus looked up and happened to notice the poor widow putting in her two small coins (Lk 21:1-4). Mark tells us more specifically (12:41-44) that *Jesus was watching* the people put their money into the treasury and when he saw the poor widow with her two small coins, he gathered the disciples around him to tell them about her. In the story of Jesus and the children, only Mark tells us that *Jesus was indignant* when the disciples turned them away, and that *he put his arms around them and gave them his blessing* (10:13-16). And in the encounter with the rich young man, only Mark tells us that *Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him* (10:17-22). All of these intimate details, proper to Mark, as well as, conversely, the paucity of Mark's theological enlargement, help us to rivet our attention directly on the person of Jesus.

Focus on Jesus

Mark begins his Gospel, very simply and straightforwardly, with the words *The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God* (1:1). Immediately, all attention is fixed squarely on Jesus himself and he is identified at once as the Son of God. Matthew begins, *A genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham* (Mt 1:1); and Luke is interested in drawing up an account of *the events that have taken place among us* (cf. Lk 1:1-4).

For Mark, the question is "Who is Jesus?" He wants to tell us the good news *about* Jesus, the good news preached *by* Jesus and, especially, that Jesus himself *is* the good news.¹ Throughout the Gospel, Jesus is the center of all the action. Only Jesus teaches in Mark's Gospel. There is nothing, for instance, of John the Baptist's eschatological preaching in Mark as there is in Matthew (Mt 3:7-11) nor of his ethical admonitions as recorded by Luke (Lk 3:10-14).² Mark is interested only in the person of Jesus. There are no side issues or developments of secondary themes to distract from the central figure. Everything points to Jesus; all else is subordinated to him.

Where Matthew (13:10) and Luke (8:10) speak of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, Mark (4:11) uses the word in the singular. For him, there is only one mystery -- translated "secret" in the Jerusalem Bible, probably to coincide with Mark's general theme of the Messianic secret --- and that is Jesus himself. The disciples are privileged to know him who embodies in his own person the entire message of the Gospel.

Mark's theology, although succinct, is yet immensely rich in content. As do the other Synoptics, Mark carefully records the theophany following the Baptism of Jesus but, unlike the other evangelists, he alone directly states that Jesus received baptism (1:9-11). Matthew tells us that Jesus intended to be baptized and that, at his insistence, John yielded to him (Mt 3:13-17);

and both Matthew and Luke (Lk 3:21-22), refer to the Baptism as an accomplished fact.³ Only Mark identifies both the grandeur and the humility of Jesus at this key moment by telling us plainly that Jesus... was baptized in the Jordan by John (1:9). This is another of the ways in which Mark grounds us in the mystery of Jesus himself.

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus (1:12-13), very brief, also has its own theological significance. By not delineating the individual temptations of Jesus as do Matthew and Luke, Mark draws attention to the larger, cosmic dimension of Jesus in direct combat with the demonic powers. Mark draws a parallel between Jesus being driven into the desert by the Spirit, and Jesus himself later driving out the spirits of evil.⁴ For Mark, the temptation scene is a foreshadowing of the public ministry of Jesus and the key to interpreting the many exorcisms and battles with unclean spirits included in the narrative.⁵ We find the same focus on Jesus in the scene of the Transfiguration. While Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses (Mt 17:1-9); and Luke attends to the passage he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:2-10); Mark's whole thrust is on the beauty of Jesus himself. When it is all over and the vision fades, the disciples look up and see *only Jesus* (9:2-8).

Only Jesus is the inspiration behind the Messianic secret too. Jesus is named *Son of God* in the very first verse but he cannot be recognized as such until we have been prepared to accept the consequences. The deliberate attempts of Jesus to conceal his identity accentuate the majesty of his presence and place him in sharp contrast to the clamor of the demons and the shallow enthusiasm of the crowds. Jesus is set apart from the disciples too. Their minds grow dimmer as the brilliance of the light of the mystery of Jesus intensifies. One group after another falls away from him. The religious leaders plot against him; the relatives think he is out of his mind; the disciples cannot understand. In the end they desert him completely until Jesus stands alone as the message and model of divine Sonship.

Geographically, Mark constructs his Gospel as a procession from Galilee to Jerusalem which Jesus makes amid the growing hostility that culminates in his death. Luke picks up the same journey motif but with far greater fanfare and to different theological purpose. In Luke, Jesus begins his journey toward death by a resolute choice (cf. Lk 9:51) and readers are reminded of this advance to Jerusalem periodically throughout the subsequent narrative (Lk 9:53, 57; 10:1; 13:22, 33; 17:11). His intent is to highlight the Holy City as the locus of salvation. For Mark, however, only the mystery of the Cross is important, and he who is transfixed upon it -- the Crucified Messiah.

The Son of God

"The Crucified Messiah" -- a contradiction in terms, almost an oxymoron, and Mark intends for us to read it that way: a paradox, incomprehensible, a mystery. Who is Jesus? A man of remarkable power and authority, Mark answers, able to forgive sins (2:5) and cast out devils (5:1-20). Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath (2:28), He commanded the sea (4:39-41) and raised the dead (5:39-41). Jesus taught with authority (1:22, 27; 11:28-33), had foreknowledge of the future and ability to direct events (11:2-6, 13; 14:13-15). Even the evil spirits recognized him and came out shrieking, *You are the Son of God* (1:24; 3:11; 5:7).⁶ How then can he have been *crucified*?

Son of God is Mark's foremost title for Jesus and the key to his identity. It is not used often but the text is punctuated with its use at certain significant junctures, each with a reference to the Cross. The Gospel opens with the solemn proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son

of God (1:1) and concludes with that same recognition at his death by the Roman centurion (15:39). Between these two brackets, the voice of the Father twice confirms his identity and Jesus himself affirms that he is indeed the Son of God at the official interrogations that condemned him to death. Three shafts of light piercing the gathering darkness of incomprehension and hostility: The first, at the baptism inaugurating his public ministry, the voice from heaven declares, *You are my Son, the Beloved. My favor rests on You* (1:11). In Mark's version, only Jesus hears the voice.⁷ The Father is speaking exclusively to him; his identity remains his personal secret. A second stage is reached when Jesus, having elicited a confession of faith and the pledge of personal allegiance from his disciples, now announces to them his impending death. Again the voice from heaven resounds, this time at the Transfiguration and directly to the disciples as they are rapt in vision of Jesus' transcendent glory, *This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him* (9:7). And finally, a third clear pronouncement made by Jesus before the whole assembly of the Sanhedrin and in the presence of the high priest. *Are you the Christ, ... the Son of the Blessed One?* Jesus is asked. *I am*, he answered (14:62) and went on to predict his second coming to remove all possible doubt about his meaning. His hearers understood and judged him deserving of death.

It is interesting to note that Mark does not use the title *Son of God* as Matthew does following the incident of Jesus walking on the water and calming the sea. In Matthew's version, the disciples already recognize Jesus as the Son of God at this early stage and bow down before him saying, *Truly you are the Son of God* (Mt 14:33). In Mark, they are utterly and completely dumbfounded... Their minds were closed (6:52). And again in Mark, Peter's reply to Jesus' question, *Who do you say I am?* is simply *You are the Christ* (8:30). In Matthew, Peter not only acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah but adds, *the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:16). In Mark, this complete understanding is reserved to the end. Only in light of the Cross is the mystery of Jesus as the Son of God grasped. *The centurion ... had seen how he died*, and he said, *In truth this man was a son of God* (15:39).

The Meaning of Sonship

The word "son" itself evokes a wide variation of meaning⁸ and we may assume it was Mark's intention to incorporate all of them into his text. It may refer to royalty and kingship as in psalm 2:7: *You are my son, today I have become your father* and in the prophecy of Nathan, *I will be a father to him and he a son to me* (2 Sam 7:14). Implied in these texts and in others too numerous to recall here, are predilection and choice, and an investment with divine power and authority.

The Servant Songs of Isaiah (Is 42: 1-9; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-11; 52:13-53:12) suggest another image altogether. Although these texts also contain references to divine election, as well as to greatness once the ordeal is past, the emphasis is on the mission entrusted to the mysterious Servant of bringing God's salvation to the people and on the outrage and contempt that will be his lot in the accomplishment of his task. The lessons here are discipleship, fidelity, gentleness and patience, and the free-will offering of himself for sinners whose guilt he takes upon himself.

In yet another series of texts, the word "son" designates Israel itself.⁹ For example, in Exodus 4:22, Moses is instructed to say to Pharaoh, *Israel is my first born son*. In Deuteronomy 1:31, we read, [the Lord] *carried you, as a man carries his child, all along the road...* and in Jeremiah 31:9, *For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first born son*. The covenantal bond of God with Israel, running through the entire Old Testament, is fundamentally a father-son relationship. *I will be their God and they will be my people* (Jer 31:33).

The Book of Wisdom moves in still another direction when it equates divine Sonship with suffering for virtue's sake. *Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life... He claims to have knowledge of God and calls himself a son of the Lord... If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part* (Wis 2:12. 13. 18).

There is testing involved in sonship as we read in the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, *Your son... whom you love* (Gen 22:1). Abraham proved his devotion to God by not withholding his most prized possession. In all these variegated examples, rich in complexity and meaning, are common threads which overlap in sentiments of divine favor, intimacy, profundity of love and reciprocity.

There is still one further attestation of divine Sonship in Mark's Gospel -- that of Jesus in Gethsemane, in the acceptance of his fate. *Abba (Father) he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I would have it* (14:36). Only Mark uses the intimate term of tender, trustful affection: *Abba*. Matthew's more formal *My Father* (Mt 26:42) and Luke's avoidance of Aramaic expressions (cf. Lk 22:42) do not convey the same childlike confidence or at least not to the same degree. Each evangelist has his own vision, each his own detail, to color his portrait of Jesus. Matthew highlights the Father with symbols of strength and protection. Mark's image is the reverse. His interest touches Jesus more directly; his approach is from the side of the Son. Mark's accent is on filial obedience, trustful surrender and the simple confidence of a small child knowing he is safe in his father's arms. *Abba*.

We have already noted the power and authority with which Jesus was endowed and which so captivated the popular mind. But the other features of divine Sonship -- those of service and mission and of suffering for the cause of right and in expiation for others -- these were far from the expectations of those who initially welcomed the word with joy. And as the realization of all that was entailed in the person and message of Jesus began to be unveiled, the minds of his listeners gradually became more and more opaque, more and more unable to comprehend.

The Son of Man

Commentators generally divide the Gospel of Mark into two main sections, entitled, for example: The Mystery of the Messiah, followed by The Mystery of the Son of Man¹⁰ or, in another version, The Mystery of Jesus and The Mystery Revealed.¹¹ It is commonly understood that a climax is reached in Mark's Gospel and a turning point occurs with Peter's confession of faith (8:27-30). Prior to this moment, attention is fixed on the mystery of Jesus' person and on the works he accomplishes. The latter half of the Gospel is devoted to an exposition of the nature of messiahship which resides, not in glory as was anticipated, but in suffering and death.

Son of Man is a self-designating term that Jesus uses to insist on the kind of Messiah he is to be: a suffering Messiah, not glamorous or popular, not acclaimed for his miraculous power or authoritative presence. In itself, *Son of Man* is an obscure title with deep roots in the Old Testament and other non-biblical apocalyptic literature.¹² Originally it was derived from a Hebrew and Aramaic idiom which referred to collective humanity, as in Psalm 8:4: *What is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him?* Later it was used to designate an individual representative of the whole,¹³ somewhat as Adam -- a generic word meaning "taken from the soil" -- became the name of the first man. It was used most often in the Old Testament to indicate man's lowly estate and mortal nature in contrast to the divine prerogatives (cf. Ezechiel where it is used ninety three times). The Book of Daniel later invested it with overtones of eschatological triumph. Here (Dn 7), *Son of Man* is used in an

exalted sense. The human assumes divine qualities in contrast to the terrifying beasts whom God destroys.¹⁴ It indicates a single individual upon whom is conferred a royal function of dominion over the whole earth.

Jesus combines these various traditions to expound the truth about himself. First of all, he introduces himself as simply human with no claims to superiority over the human condition.¹⁵ Son of Man is a lowly title. Yet neither are the connotations of divine power and of reaching beyond the merely human absent from Jesus' self understanding. It is as Son of Man that *he has power to forgive sins* (2:10) and *is Lord of the Sabbath* (2:28). And it is *the Son of Man who serves and gives his life as a ransom for many* (10:45). It is as Son of Man that he will come *in the glory of his Father with the holy angels* (8:38) and *on the clouds of heaven* (13:27; 14:62). And it is *the Son of Man who must suffer grievously, be treated with contempt, who will be mocked and scourged and spit upon and put to death and, finally, as Son of Man he will rise from the dead* (cf. 8:31; 9:12; 10:33-34).

All of these aspects are open to view in one of the few parables Mark has retained in his Gospel -- that of the wicked husbandmen (12:1-12). Here, Jesus designates himself as the Beloved Son of the Owner of the vineyard and exposes the plots of the tenants -- the religious leaders -- to kill him. Divinity is present as well as awareness of his mortal human state. We also find traces of the multiple strands of the traditions associated with divine Sonship as mentioned earlier. He is the beloved Son, sent on a mission for which he will be covered with opprobrium, and will end by laying down his life. The parable concludes with hints of divine vindication.

It seems that to Mark belongs the distinction of being the first to fuse the image of the triumphant Son of Man with that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.¹⁶ There is no tradition of a suffering Son of Man prior to Mark. Nor is there any overt glory assigned to the mysterious Servant of Isaiah for the contempt heaped upon him. But the combination of the two is the key that unlocks Mark's Messianic secret.

Like the title *Son of God*, that of *Son of Man* is many layered and enigmatic, lending itself to multiple interpretations. In Mark its use is three-dimensional, descriptive in the first place of Jesus' human activity; then of his future coming in glory; and finally, bridging these together, his suffering, dying and rising.¹⁷ The three aspects cannot be separated. Jesus is both human and divine, lowly and exalted; the connecting link is the deep humiliation of the Cross. Taken together they form a single whole that underlies and elucidates the Gospel of Mark whose message is that Jesus is the Son of God.

Conclusion of Part III

The entire message of Mark's Gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God. Stated in the first verse, its significance can only be realized at the very end. Sonship is identified with the Cross. Jesus is a crucified Messiah. Throughout his Gospel, Mark habitually draws all attention to Jesus. There are the touching details and the humanness of Jesus. Then there is the gradual falling away of all until Jesus is left alone. Finally, as the spotlight continues to narrow its beam, the essence of divine Sonship becomes clear. Early on, already in the opening verses of the third chapter (cf. 3:6), we are confronted with the reality of the Cross; its long shadow is cast throughout the remaining narrative. The Cross is central for Mark because it is only in the Cross that the image of Jesus -- the Crucified Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man -- can come into focus.

There is decided prominence given to Jesus' Sonship in Mark's Gospel. It is not that Mark's message is different from that of the other New Testament writers. No. All are in agreement with the same basic truth that Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead. The difference lies in the emphasis Mark offers and the intensity with which he presents his convictions.

Mark cues us in on the profound connection between suffering and divine Sonship, or, stated in other terms, between suffering and glory. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus proves himself a Son -- the Son of God -- by taking on himself the status of the Suffering Servant and in his filial obedience to the One he calls *Abba*. And it is in his death that his Sonship is revealed. At the same time, it is by the sacrifice he makes of his life that Jesus comes to glory. In Mark, the vindication does not come afterward, in the resplendence of the resurrection, as later writers indicate. The resurrection is barely mentioned. The glory, for Mark, is in the Cross itself. It is in Jesus' death that the Messianic secret comes to light. This is a profound message, shattering all our preconceptions and laying bare the rock-bottom foundations of our Christian faith and the heritage that is ours as followers of Christ. Mark's Gospel is simple. It is stark. It is also profound, staggering in the meaning it proffers. Jesus, the Crucified Messiah, is the Son of God.

Part IV: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John

Finally, we come to John's Gospel, the last of the four to be written and, by contrast, strikingly different from the other three. One enters a new world with John's Gospel, an awesome world of images and symbols, signs and obscure language. Here we encounter life contending with death, light shining through the darkness, truth overthrowing all falsehood. John's vision is the mystery of the Word made flesh and the fathomless depths of the Triune God.

Time has elapsed since the earlier Gospels were written, time spent in ongoing meditation on the identity of Jesus -- who he was and where he had come from -- and on the meaning of his life and death. Three prior accounts, addressed to three diverse audiences, and reflecting increments of growth in understanding as well as differing aspects of a message too rich to be compressed into a single mold, had already been circulated and assimilated by the Christian communities. By the time John wrote his Gospel -- between 90 and 110, commentators agree -- the Church was already moving into a new stage of development. The first growth crises of the early Church had been well weathered: continuity with the Jewish Scriptures had been firmly established; the new faith was wide open to Gentile believers in addition to Jewish.

But new situations continued to arise, creating fresh questions and demanding new answers. The apostles were passing away: how would Jesus' presence be kept alive in the Church? The Christian community had by now firmly established its own sacramental and liturgical life: what was the connection between these rituals and the historical Jesus of Nazareth?¹⁸ Could it be that the Jewish tradition was meant to be transcended, the Old Covenant fall away to make room for the New? Questions such as these are at the base of John's Gospel. He provides the answer in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh. The Word made flesh in turn initiates us into the mystery of the Trinity.

John and the Synoptics

There are glimmers of the triune nature of God in each of the Synoptics, firm but not yet sharpened intuitions based on God's three-fold outward activity. Each Synoptic recognizes the influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. Each recounts his unique relationship to the Father. Each further emphasizes one or other of the three Divine Persons in the telling of his Gospel story. But it belongs to John to bring these inchoate insights to full expression. With Matthew, John looks to the source. While the former alludes to the Father throughout his text, the latter directly names God as Father one hundred and seven times. What Matthew could see only dimly from afar, John brings into the full light of day, making the Father's love the foundation of his doctrine. John shares with Matthew a concern for the Chosen People and a love for the Jewish Scriptures. Like Matthew, John wrote his Gospel for the Jews. Both make use of Old Testament types to illustrate their understanding of Jesus. However, whereas Matthew concentrates more on explicit texts and concrete circumstances, John interprets the meaning; his allusions are more spiritualized; he broadens into themes. Matthew stands at the beginning of the process of faith formation. He wants to prove that Jesus is the expected Messiah by showing how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus. John brings the process forward. He is more interested in pointing out how Jewish ideas and institutions are transcended and transformed in the New Covenant.

Alongside Luke, John's Gospel too is a Gospel of the Spirit. Yet, because their two purposes are different, their perspectives differ as well. Luke brings out the Holy Spirit's activity in relation to Jesus himself; John sees the Holy Spirit as poured out from Jesus in his glorification. Luke wants to set in relief the essential part played by the Holy Spirit in the spreading of the Gospel. He wants us to know that the Spirit given only to a few in the old dispensation is now the possession of all believers.¹⁹ John is more preoccupied with the Holy Spirit's internal activity, enabling the Church to come to a deeper understanding of what Jesus said and did and of things yet to come.²⁰ Luke speaks of the Holy Spirit as power, bringing the Church to its universal destiny; John's emphasis is on the Spirit as Sanctifier, principle of life within the Church.²¹ Luke speaks of the Holy Spirit's activity; John of his person. The latter builds upon the former.

John completes Mark as well. Mark's Gospel is the first to be written; John's the last. Both focus on Jesus as Son of God, Mark setting the stage for John's fuller insight into the Word made flesh in ways the more developed theologies of Matthew and Luke do not. These latter extend their treatment of Jesus outward more to the inauguration of God's kingdom.²² John comes back and centralizes our attention once again on Jesus himself. It is as if with John we come full circle and end as we have begun, in awe at the person of Jesus. Both Mark and John are preoccupied with the humanity of Jesus; both attempt to probe its hidden mystery. The basic structure of John's Gospel follows that of Mark. Mark divides his Gospel into two main sections, The Mystery of the Messiah, treating of the public life of Jesus, the signs and wonders he worked and the initial impact he made on the people; and The Mystery of the Son of Man, searching into the deeper reality of the person of Jesus which is contained in the Cross, in his passion and death. Similarly, John's Gospel contains two parts, roughly covering the same territory. The Book of Signs treats of the public ministry; The Book of Glory, the passion, death and resurrection. In both John and Mark, the foreboding of Jesus' death is ever present; both place Jesus' glory in his essential Father-Son relationship to God proved by the laying down of his life.

In each of these three instances, John turns a page and offers a fresh synthesis. He completes the portraits begun by the Synoptics, picking up where they left off, drawing out and interpreting their hidden meaning. In this way, John's Gospel indicates that the first stage of

development in the life of the Church has ended and a new one about to begin. In the chapter just ending, the task of the Church had been to form her own identity, in continuity with, yet separate from Judaism; in the chapter just beginning she will move with confidence into the Greco-Roman world. Here she will be met by further challenges in the struggle to hammer out her faith in terms of unfamiliar philosophical categories. John's Gospel with its crystal clear affirmation of the identity of Jesus lights the way ahead.

Jesus, the Word Made Flesh

The crowning achievement of John's Gospel is his unequivocal insight that this man Jesus [whom] *we have heard and seen with our own eyes*, [whom] *we have watched and touched with our hands* (1Jn 1:1) is God in human flesh. It is not enough for John to look at Jesus in relation to the kingdom as do the earlier Gospel writers (a Christology from below); he looks at Jesus in relation to God (a Christology from above). The Synoptic accounts of Jesus are descriptive; they tell us his life story. John's is ontological; he pierces to the heart; John tells us who Jesus *is*.

John is not concerned to tell us much about Jesus. He assumes that the basic facts of Jesus' life are already well known among his readers. Instead, he interprets the events, disclosing their underlying meaning. With the Synoptics he shares only a few incidents:

- the miracle of the loaves (6:1-15; cf. Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17);
- the walking on the water (6:16; cf. Mt 14:22-23; Mk 6: 45-52);
- the cleansing of the Temple (2:13; cf. Mt 21: 12-15; Mk 11:11);
- the triumphal entry into the Holy City on Palm Sunday (12:12-19; cf. Mt 21:1-9; Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:28-38).

John records alongside the Synoptics:

- Mary's anointing at Bethany (12:1-8; cf. Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9);
- Peter's denials (18:15-27; cf. Mt 26:58, 69-70; Mk 14:54, 66-72; Lk 22:54-62);
- and the treachery of Judas (13:21; cf. Mt 26:21-25; Mk 14:18-21; Lk 22: 21-23).

Only one miracle of healing, the cure of the centurion's son (4:43; cf. Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10), among the many described by the Synoptics finds a place in John's Gospel. Instead, John gives seven *signs*, clues to the significance of all that Jesus said and did.

John relies on types and symbols to create impressions and evoke images in an attempt to express the inexpressible. In this way he draws us into the mystery. For John, Jesus is the Paschal lamb, the bridegroom, the serpent in the desert, the bread of life, the true vine, the good shepherd, the light of the world, every Old Testament type of God's dealings with his people, now brought to their completion in Jesus. There is a festive quality to John's Gospel with its gifts of light and life, new wine, living water and abundance of food. It opens with a wedding feast to which Jesus and his disciples are invited; it closes when the hour announced had come and the marriage consummated on the Cross. In between, three times the Passover is celebrated, each time marking the importance of the event it signifies; three times an entire week is calculated, harking back to Genesis and signaling a new creation in the making.

John's first and principal image of Jesus, found only in the Prologue but fundamental to an understanding of the Gospel as a whole, is that of The Word. Jesus is God's Word, John tells us, God's thought, his very mind, the revelation of himself. Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks by acting in human history.²³ His words are powerful deeds effecting what they signify. God's word was present at creation cf. Gn1; also Pr 8:22-31; Wi 7:12, 21; Si 23:20; 42:16). It was embodied in the Law and the prophets (Si 19:20; 24:23-34). It was manifest in kings and rulers (1Kg 3:9; Wi 7:27). God's word has a redemptive quality. It is sent out from God on

mission and returns to God having accomplished the work it was given to do (cf. Is 55:10-11). Of ourselves, we have no access to God's word; yet God freely gives it to us (Pr 2:6; Jb 28:21). It leads us back to God (Pr 8:35; 9:5), shows us how to live (Si 4:11-22) and is the giver of all good things (cf. Si 4:11-19). All of these are manifestations of God himself present and acting in the world he made. The final act is God's Word itself made flesh in Jesus.

Jesus is not merely a word of God. He is *The Word*, the Son of God, present to God before time began, The Word, in eternal dialogue with his Father, a dialogue of light and life, of knowledge and love, The Word ever receiving divine life from God as the Father is ever pouring it forth, The Word, sent out in every saving word of God uttered throughout the centuries.

By establishing a rapport between God and God's Word in this way, John illumines from within the essential character of the Christian message. Of preeminent importance is relationality: The Word in relation to God; God in relation to the world; Jesus in relation to his Father and to his disciples; the disciples in relation to one another. No one member stands alone. All together we form one divine community. The many conversations, the debates and discussions with the Jews,²⁴ the prolonged discourses, all tell us something of God's own inner life and of our sharing in that life, made known and won for us by Jesus.

The Word was made flesh, he lived among us and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (1:14). There is no Transfiguration scene in John's Gospel. Instead, the awesome splendor of Jesus that was glimpsed only momentarily on that one occasion as mentioned by the Synoptics pervades John's entire Gospel. Jesus' majestic bearing, his solemn *I am* statements evocative of divinity, and his overt relationship to the Father, proclaim emphatically on every page his divine nature and affirm the glory that he manifested to the disciples.

Acclaiming him as fully divine, John is equally careful to portray Jesus as really and entirely human. *The Word was made flesh* (1:14). The choice of terms is deliberate. *Sarx, flesh*, signifies humanity in its corporeal existence, in its relation to the material world, subject to change, corruption, and death.²⁵ Neither is the verb *was made* accidental. John wanted to say more than merely that the Word inspired Jesus or dwelt in human flesh. John insists that the Word *was made* flesh. This man Jesus in his human flesh *is* the Word of God. God in Jesus truly entered our human sphere. Far from being merely spiritual or symbolic, John gives us numerous concrete historical details unmentioned by the Synoptics such as names of persons and places or times of day. In addition, John fixes precisely the durations of Jesus' ministry and the chronology of his passion. The signs he worked have a clearly material aspect. They effect real changes in this world.²⁶ The eyes of the blind were opened; Lazarus was raised to life again.

The Manhood of Jesus

He lived among us (1:14). Jesus is human in every sense of the word. His parentage and the circumstances of his childhood are known (cf. 7:14-15, 41-42). He becomes tired (4:6), he thirsts (4:7; 19:28), he is hurt in the face of betrayal (13:21), he knows sorrow (11:33), sheds tears (11:35), expresses anguish (12:27), he is tempted (cf. 6:15, 26; 7:24). Most of all, he has friends and shows his love for those closest to him (11:5, 36; 13:1; 20:2).²⁷

The term *sarx* can also stand for all that is opposed to God, the rejection of and the rebellion against God. This is the human world that Jesus entered. And it is here that his glory is manifested. Jesus' glory is in his union with God, in his radical antithesis to the character of the

world, in his death to all that this world holds dear. Jesus seeks God's glory by standing opposed to all falsehood (7:18; 8:54-58), darkness (1:5, 9, 14) and self-seeking (5:41-44).²⁸

Many times throughout his Gospel, John refers to Jesus as *the man*, *anthropos*. Beginning with John the Baptist, *A man is coming after me who ranks before me* (1:30), the Samaritan woman (4:29), the cured paralytic (5:11), the man born blind (9:11, 16, 24), each in turn refers to Jesus in his humanity, *a man* or *the man*. Complaints are registered against the human Jesus also. *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* (6:52) and *You are only a man and you claim to be God* (10:33). In the Passion narrative, Peter is asked, *Aren't you one of that man's disciples?* (18:17) and Pilate likewise asks, *What charges do you bring against this man?* (18:29). The culminating statement, Pilate's *Here is the Man* (19:15) parallels the acknowledged kingship of Jesus as he was handed over to be crucified. *Here is your King* (19:15).²⁹ On the one side we have the human Jesus at his lowest, most vulnerable point, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, covered with opprobrium, soon to be led away to crucifixion and death. On the other we have the sovereignty of Jesus, majestic in the face of his degradation, reigning in glory from the Cross (19:20-21), triumphant over the powers of sin and evil: the Godhead of Jesus hidden and manifest in the *sarx*.

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God is central and key to an understanding of John's Gospel. The Word was made flesh. As God he reveals our sublime vocation: all that we are called to, all that we are capable of, all that we may become, through him, with him, in him. As man, Jesus reveals the resplendent beauty of God's intimate Trinitarian life and his love for the created world. Jesus is the human face of God. To sit at God's table we need only look at Jesus, eat his bread, share his life.

Whoever Sees Jesus Sees the Father

No one has ever seen God, John tells us. *It is the only Son who is nearest the Father's heart who has made him known* (1:18). Almost every page of John's Gospel unveils the fatherhood of God, made known to us in the attitude and stance of Jesus' Sonship. It is by gazing upon the Son that we come to know the Father.

The meaning of Sonship has already been introduced to us in the Prologue. *The Word was with God and the Word was God* (1:1). To be a son means to have received life from another. It is a relational term, pointing beyond itself to the source from which the son springs. The essential movement of John's Gospel, his primary intent, is to illumine our faith, directing our attention beyond the facts of Jesus' earthly existence to their eternal reality in God. Who is the Father, then, that Jesus reveals?

Jesus is the perfect Son of the all holy Father. His entire life was a turning to the Father in total surrender, his eyes ever fixed on the Father's will, constantly straining forward to the hour when he would return to the Father. And the Father's love for Jesus is just as evident. *The Father loves the Son*, John tells us, *and has entrusted everything to him* (3:35). He gives him authority (17:2), bestows on him the power of judgment (5:22, 27) and promises him the glory that was his from the beginning (cf. 17:1,5). On his part, Jesus does nothing of himself (8:28). He imitates the Father in everything, does only what he sees the Father doing (5:19), teaches what has been given him to say (8:40; 12:49-50). The Father and Son are One (10:30; 17:22). As the Father gives life, so Jesus gives life to all those whom the Father gives him (5:26; cf. 10:29). Whoever honors the Son honors the Father (5:23), whoever believes in Jesus believes in the One who sent him (12:44). There is perfect similarity of action between Father and Son

(5:17, 19, 26), total mutual belonging (17:10), complete reciprocity of knowledge (10:15), of immanence (10:38) and of love (5:20; 15:10).³⁰

John tells us that the underlying motive for the Incarnation is love. *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life* (3:16). In another place he tells us that eternal life consists in knowledge of [the Father], *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [he has] sent* (17:3). Knowledge in the Biblical sense is not merely the result of an intellectual process. It is the fruit of experience and of personal contact.³¹ It is the counterpart of love, which in turn is not simply an emotion but bears qualities of loyalty, intimate knowledge and responsibility.³² In still another place John tells us plainly, *God is love* (1Jn 4:8, 16). Love is the revelation itself, the quintessential message of John's Gospel: God's love for us, our call to love in like manner, in return. Love supplies the energy that propels the dialogue within the Bosom of the Trinity and beyond.

All of Jesus' life is an expression of love for God and of God's love for him. The mystery of the cross is the summit of that revelation. The Johannine view, unlike that of the Synoptics who feature Jesus as a man of suffering and in agony, concentrates on the glory of the cross. It is the hour of triumph when Jesus passes from this world to the Father, the moment when he receives the glory that was his in the beginning, the occasion for him to *pass over* his life for others. In John's Gospel, Jesus is lifted up, enthroned as king on the cross. Lifted up, as the serpent was lifted up in the desert to whom we must turn if we are to receive eternal life (3:14); lifted up, victorious over the prince of this world, in order to draw all things to himself (12: 31-32); lifted up, finally, in order to convince his hearers that the One who sent him is truthful and that what he declares to the world is what he has heard from the Father (cf. 8: 26-28). Can we say, then, that Jesus' enthronement on the cross is a revelation of the Father whose glory -- the glory that Jesus unceasingly proclaims -- consists in having also, in some incomprehensible way, "transcended himself," in effect, *laid down his life* to give birth to the Word -- his Son -- in eternal generation? *I do only what I see the Father doing* (5:19), Jesus says.

Portraits of Trinitarian Love

Jesus is the good shepherd who *lays down his life for his sheep* (10:11). He *lay[s] it down of [his] own free will and it is in [his] power to take it up again [T]his is the command [he has] been given by [the] Father* (10:18). We also read *The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again* (10:17, italics mine). Is the command Jesus receives to lay down his life and take it up again the reenactment in human flesh of the mystery of charity present eternally in the Bosom of the Trinity?

The institution of the Eucharist on the night before he died, so important in the Synoptic accounts and so integral to our faith, is not mentioned by John. Instead, he chooses to replace another account of the event with two distinct interpretations of its meaning. Chapter 6, the discourse on the bread of life, interprets Jesus' giving of his flesh to eat in terms of our relationship to God. Chapter 13, the footwashing, is symbolic of the disciples' relationship to one another, resulting from and in imitation of, Jesus' laying down of his life.

John begins his account of the multiplication of the loaves which serves as an introduction to the Eucharistic discourse with the sentence, *It was shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover* (6:4), that annual celebration commemorating the redemption of Israel from the oppression of Egypt and so rich in the imagery that characterizes the Christian liturgy of the New Covenant. The Jewish Passover was both a sacrifice symbolized by the Paschal lamb and

a sacred meal prefigured in the manna by which God fed his people throughout their long journey through the desert to the Promised Land. Jesus incorporates both aspects into his Eucharistic discourse. In the first place, Jesus invites faith in his teaching, the living bread which alone satisfies and nourishes unto eternal life. It can only be received in faith. *To hear the teaching of the Father and to learn from it, is to come to me. Everybody who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life* (6:45, 47).

Secondly, Jesus insists on the reality of the sacrifice in the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood (6:53). His body and blood are real food and real drink (6:55). The teaching is synonymous with the sacrifice; both have their origin in what Jesus has learned in heaven (6:38, 57). And, as if to leave no doubt about the meaning of his words, John points out, *After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him* (6:66). There are incarnational overtones in John's Eucharistic account. Can we not discern the Trinity as well?

The Eternal Wedding Feast

According to the chiastic structure of John's Gospel, Calvary parallels the Wedding feast of Cana.³³ The former, at the beginning of the Gospel, interprets and symbolizes the latter. The first anticipates the hour when Jesus is to fulfill his personal destiny and his glory is to be revealed; the other completes it. In both instances, the mother of Jesus is prominent. It is at her bidding that Jesus first manifests his glory (2:3-5); she stands beneath the cross (19:25-27). The term *woman* may be a reference to Gen 3:15, 20, making Mary the second Eve, the mother of all the living.³⁴ Both Cana and Calvary take place at the time of the Jewish Passover (2:13; 13:1), with all its rich symbolism of celebrating God's love and the sacrifice that accompanies it. And both are the culminating event of a week of preparation in which almost every day is outlined.

In all four Gospels (Jn 3:29; cf. Mt 9:14, etc.), Jesus applies to himself the metaphor of bridegroom, a title reserved to God in relation to his people Israel. As the Word made flesh, he represents the whole of humanity before God, making him also the bride. Jesus is himself the marriage feast. Is this not also a snapshot of the Trinitarian mystery, the relationship of Father and Son, laid open to our gaze in the person of Jesus? If indeed the death of Jesus on Calvary is the revelation of the Father as the personification of transcendent love, unselfish love, love that gives itself even to death for the other, then the resurrection that follows can only be the revelation of the Son as the Beloved, the pearl of great price for which one is willing to give all that one possesses, with all the bridal imagery such a concept suggests. *I am the resurrection and the life* (11:25). The wedding symbolism found so often in Scripture is not, I would think, primarily the story of God's love for his people but the relationship of Father and Son in an eternal embrace of charity which is then only secondarily opened to us as sharers in the divine nature.

I believe that what John is telling us throughout his Gospel, symbolically, in veiled language, yet concretely, visibly, tangibly, in human terms that we can understand, is that Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, is a revelation of the Trinity itself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an eternal embrace of love, a love that characterizes itself by laying down one's life for the other. The fullness of the mystery of Jesus and likewise the fullness of the mystery of the Trinity is made manifest at Calvary: Death ordained to Resurrection; sacrifice blossoming into life.

My Father and Your Father

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited (2:1). In every respect, John's Gospel completes and perfects the initial meditations of the Synoptics. John's soteriology is no exception. It is not that John says things other than the earlier writers, although his collection of parables and images is uniquely his own. John too seeks to persuade and to draw out the implications of the Christian way of life as do Matthew, Mark and Luke. He too presents moral and practical considerations. What sets John on a plane above his peers is his ontology. He strikes to the root, seeing everything in light of The Word made flesh. It is because John sees so clearly that Jesus is God in human flesh that the consequences he draws out are so astounding.

What the Synoptics refer to as *the kingdom of God*, John fixes more precisely as *eternal life*. Sharpening his vision even more, John tells us that eternal life means participating in the divine life of the Trinity (cf. 14:3; 17:3). It means being born from above, in God (3:3), becoming children of God (1Jn 3:1), brothers [and sisters] in Jesus (cf. 20:17), friends of the Son of God with whom he shares his secrets, making known to them everything he has learned from his Father (15:15; cf. 1:18). John, the disciple Jesus loved, leaning back on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (13:25), duplicates the posture of the *only Son, who is nearest the Father's heart* of the Prologue (1:18). Both are expressions of intimate communion and abiding love.

Jesus explicitly wants us to be with him, where he is, with the Father (cf. 14:3). He goes ahead to prepare a place for us (14:2). He tells us that he has loved us as much as the Father has loved him (17:23), assures us that the Father himself loves us because we have believed in him (16:27) and presses us to ask for anything in his name and the Father will grant it (cf. 16:23).

Our relationship to Jesus parallels that of Jesus with his Father. And because we are *flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone* (cf. Gn 2:23), as well as one Spirit with him, as we shall see, we share the same relationship to the Father enjoyed by Jesus himself. By becoming flesh and living among us, Jesus truly entered our human world, God's presence among us, within our human family, and does not merely communicate with us from above as formerly, although even that is above our expectation. So Jesus is able to say to Mary of Magdala on the day of resurrection, *I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God* (20:17).

So close is our bond with Jesus and through him with the Father that we are one being with him, nourished by the same divine life. *I am the Vine*, Jesus tells us, *you are the branches* (15:5). His is an abiding love, for all time, through all ages, open to every human person. *Remain in my love*, Jesus bids us. *You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love* (15:10), love that expresses itself by laying down one's life for one's friends (cf. 15:2).

It is at the Last Supper on the night before he died that John states for the first time that Jesus' life and death are an expression of love not only for his Father but for his disciples as well. It is a secret that has been kept for these last moments.³⁵ Jesus exemplifies his love by a parable in action: He assumes the dress and manner of a servant and stoops to wash the disciples' feet (13:4-5). *Do you understand what I have done to you?* he asks (13:13). His act was at once a prefiguration and interpretation of his impending death on the cross as well as an exemplification of the disciples' relationship to one another. Communication with one another after the example of Jesus consists in washing one another's feet (13:14) and in laying down one's life for one's friends (15:12). Only in this way, by allowing the life-giving death of Jesus to

flow through us, will we bear the fruit expected of us by the Father, fruit that will last (cf. 15:1); only in this way will we ourselves receive the glory Jesus has received from the Father (cf. 17:21) and experience Trinitarian love; and only in this way will we be so completely one that the world will realize that Jesus was sent by the Father (17:22-23).

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete

If we have left treatment of the Holy Spirit until the very end, it is not because of any lack of understanding of his importance. Here, as always, he is the silent, unseen member of the Trinity. Even so, he has been present all along, anticipated in the signs Jesus worked, implicated in most of the major discourses. He was the confirmation accorded John the Baptist (1:34); he was introduced to Nicodemus (3:5-8) and to the Samaritan woman (4:23-24); he was the agent of belief at the Eucharistic discourse (6:63). We have left him to the end because he is the final gift, the cause, the effect, the fruit and the climax of Jesus' mission. As Jesus is the final Word, the ultimate revelation of the Father, so the Spirit is the final Gift, the summation of the entire message of salvation offered to us in Jesus.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out, If any[one] is thirsty, let him come to me! Let [him] come and drink who believes in me! As Scripture says: From his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive (7:37-38). John links the gift of the Spirit to the glorification of Jesus. *For there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified (7:39).* The moment for handing over the Spirit was as he died on the cross (19:30) and in his first post-resurrection appearance to the disciples when he breathed out his Spirit upon them (20:22).

Jesus' promise of the Spirit is made on the last and greatest day of the festival. This was not, however, the feast of Passover which punctuates John's Gospel at other key moments. To proclaim the Spirit John chooses instead the feast of Tabernacles. Passover is a springtime feast; Tabernacles marks the harvest. Tabernacles is the most joyous of all the Jewish feasts. It is a feast of thanksgiving and celebrates God's presence among his people. It lasts for an entire week and for this week, too, preceding the announcement of the Spirit, time seems suspended. Jesus' movements throughout the seven days are noted, calling our attention to yet one more -- the final -- new creation, the crown of all creations, the gift of the Spirit, who will enable us to see God as he really is (cf. 1 Jn 3:2).

The feast of Tabernacles commemorates the Mosaic water-miracle of Exodus (17:1-7). Moses, listening to the cries of the people who were tormented by thirst, appealed to the Lord who commanded him to strike the rock in the desert. When he had done so, water gushed in abundance. The thirst, the striking of the desert rock, and the pouring out of the water, each symbolic of the Spirit, took place amid much grumbling and discontent. *Is God with us, or not?* (Ex 17:7) the people demanded in their unbelief. So too, Jesus' promise of fountains of living water flowing from his own breast is given against a background of controversy concerning his origin, the signs he worked, and his teachings. *The people could not agree about him (7:43),* we read. Rumors were circulating and the temple police were on the watch to arrest him (cf. 7:32). Only in the Spirit will our doubts be laid to rest; only in the Spirit will we be given to see and to understand and our thirst for truth and life be quenched.

John's name for the Spirit is *the Paraclete*, the advocate, the counselor, the helper, the consoler. He is to stand in Jesus' place when Jesus in his visible existence is no longer with us. *Unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you (16:7).* The term "paraclete" means one who

takes the place of or speaks on behalf of another. In the Old Testament, this is exemplified by Joshua who was filled with Moses' spirit (Dt 34:9) or Elisha who inherited the spirit of Elijah (2 K 2: 9,15).³⁶ In the religious realm of Hellenistic Greek, a paraclete is one who brings eschatological comfort to the afflicted and/or proclaims religious truth.³⁷

John sees the Holy Spirit as *another Advocate* (14:16), as Jesus himself is our advocate with the Father (cf. 1Jn 2:1). What is said of Jesus is said of the Spirit as well. Both are sent by the Father. Jesus comes in the Father's name (5:43); the Spirit comes in Jesus' name (14:26; 15:26). Jesus is Truth and the Holy One of God (6:69; 14:6); the Paraclete is the Spirit of Truth and the Holy Spirit (14:17, 26). Jesus will remain with his disciples and make his dwelling with them (14:17; 15:5). So too the Paraclete will be in them (14:15) and they will know him as they know Jesus (14:9; 16:17). The Paraclete will remind them of what Jesus taught and will glorify him (14:26; 16:13-14) as Jesus speaks what the Father taught and glorifies him (8:28; 14:31; 17:4). As the world did not know or accept Jesus (8:14, 19; 15:18-20), so it cannot see or know the Paraclete (14:17).³⁸

The role of the Spirit in John is, primarily, to testify to the truth, a concept very different from that of Paul or Luke or the Synoptics. The latter see the Holy Spirit as a guiding force in Jesus' own life. Luke, in Acts, goes further and attributes that same life power to the Church. Paul's understanding of the Spirit is as the principle of unity within the living Body of Christ. Without denying any of these aspects, John -- again -- plumbs the depths, identifying him as the Spirit of Truth.

The Holy Spirit stands as the witness to the truth, unveiling before our eyes the complete truth about Jesus, displaying the glory of the Word made flesh. He reminds us of all that Jesus said and did (14:26) and brings us to complete understanding (16:12), convicting the world of falsehood and reversing its verdict of condemnation (16:8-11). As the Paraclete, he empowers the Church to remember, to imitate and to profess the incarnational, Trinitarian love of God for our world, perpetuating the presence of Jesus in our midst, consecrating us in the truth (16:17).

Conclusion of Part IV

The resplendent jewel of John's Gospel is its clear avowal that the Word was made flesh. In this single statement all truth is contained. Nothing more need be said nor can be said. And yet, eternity itself will not be long enough to fathom the depths of its meaning.

Gazing upon Jesus through the eyes of John, we have seen God's presence throughout the centuries of salvation history. Every overture of God towards his people is summed up, finally fulfilled and effectively realized in Jesus.

Following John's gaze more deeply into the mystery, we have discovered that the root of God's action among us is in the eternal embrace of God and his Word. Now we are gazing upon what no one has ever seen and yet is immediately accessible to those who believe. Jesus is the revelation of the Father. To know Jesus is to know God in the intimacy of his triune personhood.

Led by John we have seen that Jesus reveals the Father as the source, the principle of life and unity within the Godhead, by referring everything to him. He reveals the Father again by his assumption of leadership in the laying down of his own life for others. He reveals himself as Son in his perfect obedience and surrender to the One he calls "Father." He reveals the Holy Spirit as the Witness to the Truth of blazing Charity uniting Father and Son.

We have been with John standing beneath the cross and in the upper room on the first day of the week to receive the fruit of Jesus' sacrifice, the Spirit: two stages in the mystery of passing over from death to new life, made one in that same Spirit. Here, we suggested, is the ultimate revelation of the triune God: death, symbolic of the Father's love; resurrection, bridal image of the eternal wedding feast; and the gift of the Spirit, salvation itself.

Meanings

What are we to say, then? What meanings may we glean for ourselves? I would suggest two. First, as John's Gospel shows us that the inner life of God is inherently relational, so are we, created in God's image, called to intimate communion with others.³⁹ The coming of Jesus among us has not only put us into contact with God but has transformed our horizontal relationships as well.⁴⁰ By reason of the Incarnation, every person shares in the humanity of Jesus, uniting each with the other through him. Every lack of unity, then, offends against the mystery of the Incarnation and betrays the image of the Trinity in us. And as we have seen in the example of Jesus, communion with others is purchased at the price of self-donation, washing another's feet, laying down one's life for one's friends.

The second implication draws the same threads more deeply into material reality. Not only human life but all of creation has been touched by the mystery of the Incarnation. In Jesus all flesh has been sanctified. Bread and wine and water; the shifting sands of time and place and season; the coming to birth and the falling away again: all gathered into the unchanging truth of God's universal plan of salvation which reaches its apex in Jesus. Everything comes forth in him; all returns to God in him.

Not only does creation discover its purpose, its source and its goal in Jesus but its mode of operation as well. All reality is governed by the dynamic ecstatic love of the Trinity. And the same principle of life springing from death is effective universally. In order to go forward, one must put the past behind. If the grain of wheat could think, no doubt it would shrink before the prospect of falling into the earth and dying (cf. 12:24). Nature at this stage of development is not capable of rising to self-awareness. But we are; and this places upon us the demand to freely choose to enter into the Paschal mystery if we would find life. This is the truth that sets us free (8:32) and that we see in Jesus who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (14:6).

Summary:

Who is God? And who is Jesus Christ? Who was he for his contemporaries, those who knew him in the flesh, and who is he for us now, some twenty centuries later?

We do not have the advantage of proximity to the source with its resulting freshness of vision, its enthusiasm, its joy, its sense of wonder. Our sights have become blunted with time -- but not necessarily so. Time has its own advantage; it offers the wisdom of experience, richness, depth and mellowed strength. It is only in time that the first fragile shoots -- of thought, of nature, of personhood, of faith -- may come to full flower, as we have seen in the progressive understanding and development of theological expression among the four evangelists.

In the preceding pages we have walked through the four Gospels seeking to understand each author's message, interlocking four times over with questions and thoughts of my own.

Four different faces of Jesus have emerged, four different stages of doctrinal development, four manifestations of our relationship to God, four dimensions of time.

In "Snapshots of the Trinity in the Four Gospels" we discovered in Matthew the preponderance of a time of waiting, of preparation, come to its fulfillment, opening now to receive the new wine of the Gospel. Matthew takes us back into the tradition, grounding us in the past, weaving threads of unity even as he knows the old has passed away. In Matthew it is the face of the Father that appears, the Principle of unity, the Source of all that is. It is here, enveloped in the rhythmic heartbeat of God's unceasing love for his people, mysterious, hidden, yes, but all-embracing and enduring for all ages, past, present and to come.

We considered Luke's vision as of a new beginning, guided and fashioned by the Holy Spirit. In many ways, Luke is a counter-point to Matthew. His Gospel is lightsome and joyful, expressive of the quick, darting movements of a young Church, newly born and eager to explore and to learn. Here the action of Holy Spirit looms large, calling forth a transformed world in which peace and justice may reign and telling us to "fear not" even though we continue to experience the birth-pangs of what is yet to come.

Mark confronts us with the unvarnished truth of our human condition. He shows us to be as we are, stumbling, bumbling disciples groping our way in the darkness of incomprehension, one step forward, two back. It is among such as ourselves that Jesus, the Son of God, the light shining in the darkness, has pitched his tent, as John, of course, tells us, taking us to the other side of reality where we may view the terrain from within the Bosom of God himself.

In all four Gospels it is Jesus we contemplate but the kaleidoscope of colors and images is constantly changing. In Matthew he is the giver of the New Law, the master meek and humble of heart, whose yoke is easy, whose burden is light. In Luke he is holiness personified; in Mark, the perfect disciple; in John, God himself in human flesh. And in each Gospel, the understanding that God is triune gradually comes into focus before our wondering eyes.

The apostolic age is past and revelation, is complete in Christ.⁴¹ But this does not mean that there is nothing more to be learned or that each person, each successive age, will not understand the truth in his, her, its own way. God continues to converse with us,⁴² to guide us into all truth. We have only just begun to scratch the surface of all that the coming of Jesus into our world means.

In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In him all goodness, all beauty, all truth abide. He is the solution to every problem, the answer to every question, the goal and model of every human life. To him belong all times and seasons; he is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. To him and to the One who sits on the throne be all glory forever. Amen

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- ² C.M. Tuckett, "Mark," *Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 888.
- ³ Tuckett, 889.
- ⁴ Edward J. Mally, S.J., "The Gospel According to Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et. al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 24.
- ⁵ Mally, 25.
- ⁶ Henry Wansborough, O.S.B., "Son of God," *New Catholic Commentary*, 956.
- ⁷ Mally, 24.
- ⁸ Tuckett, 889.
- ⁹ John L. McKenzie, "Son of Man," *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 830.
- ¹⁰ Mally, 22.
- ¹¹ Translation taken from the *The New Testament of the American Bible*, translated from the original Greek by members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America (New York: Image Books, 1972).
- ¹² Donald Senior, "The Son of Man," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman et. al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1242.
- ¹³ Senior, 1242.
- ¹⁴ Senior, 1242.
- ¹⁵ Jean Galot, *Who is Christ? A Theology of the Incarnation* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), 131.
- ¹⁶ S. E. Johnson, "Son of Man," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 4*, ed. George Arthur Uttrick et. al. (New York: Abingdon Press), 1962), 415.
- ¹⁷ George W. E. Nicholburg, "Son of Man," *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 6*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 144.
- ¹⁸ R. E. Brown and F. J. Moloney, Gospel According to John, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd Edition, Volume 7, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, O.F.M. Conv. et. al. (Washington, D.C.: Thomson Gale in conjunction with Catholic University of America, 2000), 908.
- ¹⁹ Prosper Grech, O.S.A., "Tradition and Theology in Apostolic Times," *New Catholic Commentary*, 847.
- ²⁰ Grech, 851.
- ²¹ Bruce Vawter, C.M., Johannine Theology, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 836.
- ²² E. C. Blackman, "Incarnation," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 3*, 693.
- ²³ *The Jerusalem Bible*, ed. Alexander Jones et. al. (New York: Doubleday, 1965), page 147, note 1a.
- ²⁴ The unfortunate use of this term, the Jews, sounding so harsh to our more ecumenically sensitive ears, can be explained by the historical circumstances in which John wrote his Gospel, a time in which the separation of the Christian Church from the Jewish synagogues was most keenly and bitterly felt. John refers to the Jews in place of the more generic chief priests, scribes and pharisees used by the Synoptics. (cf. Brown & Moloney), 908.
- ²⁵ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 34 ff.
- ²⁶ Thompson, 53 ff, 119.
- ²⁷ Cf. Galot, 100.
- ²⁸ Thompson, 111.
- ²⁹ Thompson, 105.
- ³⁰ Galot, 99.
- ³¹ *Jerusalem Bible*, p. 169, note 10 g.
- ³² E. M. Good, A Love in the Old Testament, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 2*, 164.
- ³³ I no longer have the reference from which this note was jotted down.
- ³⁴ *Jerusalem Bible*, p. 149, note 2 c.
- ³⁵ *Jerusalem Bible*, p. 175, note 13 b.
- ³⁶ Dom Ralph Russell, "St John," *New Catholic Commentary*, 1034.
- ³⁷ Robert Kysar, "Gospel of John," *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 3*, 928.
- ³⁸ Russell, 1035.
- ³⁹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Michael Downey, "Trinitarian Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1993), 971.
- ⁴⁰ Galot, 312.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), # 65.
- ⁴² *Catholic Catechism*, #66, 108, 131 & 133 and others, as well.

ROOTS AND BUDS INTERNATIONAL

Sister Mary of God, O.P.
North Guilford, CT.

When Fr. Malachy O'Dwyer arrived at the Oakland General Chapter in 1989 he had just made a visitation of forty-two monasteries in Latin America. During one of the meetings of the Commission on the Nuns he remarked that all the nuns he had encountered were certain of their identity as Dominican nuns, whatever their circumstances. We discovered later that there is evidence that their sense of identity is extraordinary. Perhaps this is evidence also of our strong filial relationship with St. Dominic?

After 800 years as we look back to St. Dominic and the nuns he gathered together, it could be of interest to recall again the origin of the International Commission of Dominican Nuns which began to bloom fairly recently. We know the nuns started to be 'international' at the prompting of St. Dominic when he asked for eight nuns from Prouilhe, France, to be foundresses of the monastery of San Sisto in Rome, Italy. According to Fr. Vicaire, they were to instruct the sisters from Rome who would be joining them in the "observances of the order," in which of course they had been instructed by St. Dominic himself. And we know that when it was not possible for Bl. Jordan to obtain nuns from Prouilhe to help found the Monastery of St. Agnes in Bologna, he received them from San Sisto. This also tells us that the nuns from the beginning were distinctly formed in the spirit of St. Dominic and his designs for the nuns of the Order. The first paragraph of our Fundamental Constitution rehearses this for us.

Fifteen years ago the first members of the International Commission of Nuns were appointed by Fr. Damian Byrne, at the recommendation of the 1989 Oakland General Chapter of the Order. This paper will endeavor to show how this came to be, introduce us to a few of the earlier members and their work, and offer a challenge for the future.

A CHAPTER COMMISSION ON THE NUNS

For the first time in the history of the Order one of the eight Commissions for the General Chapter was DE MONIALIBUS, that is, On the Nuns. It had been thought that this Commission would be able to discuss the matters and petitions that had been sent to the Chapter and Master of the Order and make some recommendations regarding them. Fr. Damian Byrne suggested additional topics for discussion, such as, the specificity of Dominican nuns, common formation, and others.

The Commission was composed of five provincials and four nuns. One of the provincials, Fr. Juan Gallego from Portugal, was its president. Three of the nuns were from the U.S. and one from Mexico (the president of the federation there). Fr. Malachy O'Dwyer, canon lawyer and procurator of the Order, was with us full time as *peritus*. This Chapter Commission realized from the beginning that since it was not representative, it was not competent to address the questions or petitions that had been sent. However, these and many other topics were discussed during our weeks together. Government in the monasteries and formation were often mentioned as areas of special concern. The gradual process of what evolved will be briefly summarized here.

From the first day the discussions pointed up the need for the nuns to interact internationally in order to be in accord with the Dominican spirit. There was an evident need for some form of continuing contact among the monasteries and also for consistent communication between the Order and the nuns for addressing their concerns. LCM 181, especially the second paragraph, was the inspiration and starting point for us in confirming the need we recognized and in seeking a way to fulfill it. This new text in our 1987 Constitutions presupposes Dominican governmental procedures for the nuns beyond the local level. And no provision is made for the exchanges necessary for the on-going "compiling or changing" of our Constitutions mentioned there. In 1989, revision was not the primary focus. But it was important for the future that a way be found for the nuns to carry this out in accord with Dominican principles of government. There would have to be sufficient mutual understanding and exchange among the nuns preceding any decisions which would affect our legislation. We saw that international contact was essential for the nuns to comply with this text which was a new development in the history of the nuns' legislation. This new responsibility was to be, as the text says, "fostered among the nuns by an awareness of their genuine vocation and special role within the Order as well as by a solicitude for Dominican contemplative life promoted according to the conditions of each new age."

The Chapter Commission on the Nuns recognized their responsibility to try to initiate some consistent way in which matters of serious concern could be addressed in the future. After days of discussion, a plan for an International Commission of Nuns was developed. Number one on the agenda for the work of the Commission, with the Promoter, would be fostering greater communication and mutual understanding among the monasteries. Also listed were the promotion of initial and on-going formation in the various geographical regions, and concern for monasteries in isolated areas. To better accomplish their work, some sort of bulletin, an organ of international communication, would be needed to promote a common understanding of LCM, to provide a forum for discussion, and to share general information about the monasteries and their needs. When our Commission's full report was completed it was given at a plenary session of the General Chapter. One of the recommendations proposed was the appointment of an International Commission of Nuns, and this was unanimously accepted by the capitulars.

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF NUNS

Some months after the Oakland Chapter Fr. Damian Byrne appointed a promoter for nuns, and in November 1990, after consultation, he appointed four nuns to be members of an International Commission of Nuns. We were to be a working Commission to begin with; full representation would come later. The document *DE MONIALIBUS* from the Oakland Chapter was to be the basis of our first meeting. This meeting was held for a week in June 1991 at the monastery in Orbe, France. The four members were:

- Sr Elie Cails, a member of the Orbe community, in her second term as president of the federation in northern France;
- Sr. Elizabeth Elive, an English-speaking African from the monastery in Bambui, Cameroon, novice mistress in her community, studying theology in Rome;
- Sr. Ana Maria Primo, from the federal monastery at Torrent, Spain, in her third term as president of that federation, and also president of the interfederation union in Spain;
- the fourth member was myself from the monastery at North Guilford, Ct, U.S.A.

The Commission members agreed to invite two nuns to participate as secretaries: Sr. Araceli Abos, also from Torrent, as Spanish-language secretary, and Sr. Mary Ann Dunn as English-language secretary. Fr. Viktor Hofstetter, former provincial of the Swiss province, was the Promoter for nuns who planned and attended our meetings and also served as translator.

Our first endeavor was to get to know one another and to foster mutual understanding of Dominican contemplative life among ourselves. We went over together a report on the points which led to the recommendation for a Commission of Nuns made at the Oakland Chapter. All at the meeting promptly recognized the need as presented, and were very willing to go ahead, to continue sowing seeds for future work.

We knew that to be effective we needed the acceptance and collaboration of all the nuns of the Order. We spent a great deal of time formulating a letter to be sent to the monasteries worldwide. We agreed that it was important to include certain elements:

- explanation that the present Commission was not representative, but it was in continuity with developments over the past years, such as, the commissions participating in the recent revision of LCM, and the commission on the nuns at the Oakland Chapter;
- importance of the collaboration of all the nuns for fostering mutual understanding, as recommended in LCM 181;
- request for comments on the document DE MONIALIBUS, and on the idea of an International Commission of Nuns;
- request for topics the monasteries would submit for future inter-communication, which would determine the work of the Commission.

The letter, in English, French or Spanish, was sent by the members of the Commission and Fr. Hofstetter to all the monasteries of the Order according to language groups or regions. The responses to the letter would determine the work of the future. This first meeting of the International Commission was a very small beginning and we were able to accomplish only the first point on the Commission agenda, that is, promoting greater communication and mutual understanding among the monasteries. At our next meeting we would need to develop a method so that all the monasteries could participate in some way in the selection of a future Commission.

DOMINICAN MONASTERIES *WORLDWIDE* RESPOND

The second meeting of the Commission and secretaries, and Fr. Hofstetter, was held at Santa Sabina during the first week of March in 1992. We were welcomed warmly by the friars, and as it turned out, greeted by Pope John Paul II when he came to celebrate Mass on Ash Wednesday!

The first few days were spent reading, discussing and reflecting on the responses from the monasteries to the Commission's letter from the first meeting. The reports were given by Sr. Ana Maria from all of Spain (85 monasteries), according to the three federations; Sr. Elie from the French-speaking monasteries in France and worldwide (32); Sr. Elizabeth from the Italian monasteries (30); myself from the English-speaking monasteries worldwide (25); and Fr. Viktor from the Spanish-speaking monasteries outside

of Spain, and also from the German-speaking monasteries (10), one Dutch, and the others.

Most of the monasteries responded to the letter, about 200 monasteries of the 235 listed. A large majority of them favored the document DE MONIALIBUS from the Oakland Chapter, and also the idea of an International Commission of Nuns and its work. Most found the document positive and encouraging. There was a small amount of opposition to the Commission and some cautions, caused for the most part by a misunderstanding of its purpose. Two overall points can be mentioned. Although the letter we sent did not have a question in regard to it, it was very clear from the responses that there was immense satisfaction with our new Constitutions on all sides. Secondly, most of the monasteries that favored the Commission mentioned that it should be representative.

Almost every aspect of our life was mentioned by one monastery or another in the responses. Because the questions in the various languages were worded differently, it is difficult to distinguish what some called “areas of concern,” from topics suggested for future exchange or study among the monasteries. So many needs and interests were mentioned: Aging communities of course, and scarcity of vocations, but also interest in Dominican government in general, the role of the chapter, formation, liturgy, study, prayer, common life, theology of enclosure, and the rest. All of the topics and comments are in the Minutes of the meeting, but would be too much to include here. After many sessions of listening to the reports on the responses, the Commission reflected together on them. We discussed what seemed to be a common search for equilibrium in the elements that make up our life – how to integrate them into the life as a unified whole. To balance study, *lectio*, and prayer with work can be a challenge today. Mention was made of a possible need for a dynamic or rhythm of life, perhaps on a weekly as well as a daily level. We realized that there is indeed a common search.

In our session with Fr. Damian Byrne we were given an outline of his proposed letter to the nuns. He noted that they all seem to have a great certainty regarding their vocation and their place in the Order. His letter would address two major areas of concern. Regarding formation, it was becoming evident that a monastery cannot undertake it alone, and it must more and more become a common project in some way. Secondly, he mentioned a number of concerns in the area of government, notably the role of the monastery chapter, an area we knew many of the monasteries had also mentioned in their responses to our letter.

We also had a session with Fr. Avagnina, vicar for the Italian monasteries. He had a meeting of the prioresses to discuss the letter we had sent from the meeting at Orbey. In general they favored the Commission and its work. Once again formation and government in the monasteries were mentioned as areas needing attention. The Commission visited the monastery in Nocera Inferiore, south of Rome, which had been founded in 1282. This was a fine community of twenty-four nuns who were very welcoming and interested in our work. This was encouraging. And it just happened that one of the nuns from Nocera was representative for Italy in the next Commission appointed.

MOVING TOWARD REPRESENTATION FROM *NINE* REGIONS

Finally during the last days of our meeting the discussions centered around the need, from the very nature of Dominican government and spirit, to develop some method of regional representation for the nuns worldwide. We agreed to present for the consideration

of the monasteries a tentative proposal which would deal with the matter of regional representation.

The following regions were proposed: North America, Latin America, Mexico, Africa, Asia, Spain, France, Italy, the rest of Europe. A letter to all the monasteries was drafted containing the proposal of these nine regions and a method of representation. In discussing possible regions, it was necessary to take into consideration not only the number of monasteries, but also the various cultures and mentalities and languages. Even with the nine regions, some adjustments would be possible and needed. We knew some of the regions would take longer than others in finding a way to unite for representation. For example, the monasteries in Africa and Asia were founded by monasteries from various countries and would be dealing with three or four languages, and also Japanese and Chinese in Asia. However, the nine monasteries in Africa were already moving toward fostering unity, as were some of the others. Latin America and the region for the "rest of Europe" (those not in Spain, France or Italy) might take longer. Each region would have to define a process for consultation whether in groups of monasteries, federations, or in some other way in order to nominate one or more nuns. These names would then be submitted to the Master of the Order for the choice of nuns from each region. The responses to this letter with the proposed regions were due by October 1992.

In July 1993 the Commission members sent a letter to all the monasteries thanking them for the responses, comments, and suggestions. In general there was no great opposition to proceeding in the proposed way. We outlined again the work of the Commission as recommended by the Oakland Chapter. We asked for nominations of nuns from each of the nine geographical regions. The Master of the Order could then appoint nuns from each of the regions to a new Commission.

FINAL MEETING AT SANTA SABINA

The third and final meeting of the first Commission was held at Santa Sabina in November 1993. The agenda included preparing a report to the monasteries and the Master of the Order on the work of the Commission thus far in relation to the recommendation of the Oakland Chapter. We were asked for any suggestions we might want to make to the Master of the Order and the new Commission. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe met with us for one of our sessions, and showed great interest in furthering the work of an International Commission of Nuns.

The overall discussions at this final meeting of the Commission centered on the experiences and enrichments we had had, some difficulties encountered, and suggestions regarding the future Commission. A letter had been sent to the monasteries worldwide after each of our meetings to report on how we were endeavoring to carry out the numbers from the Oakland Chapter regarding the Commission of Nuns. The focus for the first Commission was on the initiating point, and we tried in small ways to promote communication and mutual understanding among the monasteries. In our three years the relations among some of the monasteries that were open to exchanges among them had greatly improved. Special efforts had been made in some areas to work together. There had been interchange of books, bulletins, information, liturgy, on formation, etc. We had a complete list of all our Dominican monasteries, and now this list was made according to the nine regions.

The richness of the responses to our letters was heartening, and we regretted we were not able to explore all the possibilities. We hoped this would be done in the future. The Commission had met with two Masters of the Order (Fr. Damian and Fr. Timothy), and presented the concerns of the nuns. The promoter for nuns, Fr. Viktor Hofstetter, had visited 150 monasteries; this helped to increase contacts among some of them, and to strengthen some isolated monasteries in their Dominican identity. We recommended that the term for the next Commission be five years. We could also foresee that it would take time for some of the regions to have contact among themselves before a future Commission could function as representative. We were very grateful to Frs. Damian, Timothy, and Viktor for their great interest in the nuns and their faithful assistance, as well as to all the monasteries that collaborated so graciously with us in this small endeavor to break new ground.

NEW REPRESENTATIVE COMMISSIONS

The end of our term was the beginning of the Commission more fully represented! In May of 1994 Fr. Timothy Radcliffe sent a letter to all the monasteries affirming the purpose and status of the International Commission. He appointed eleven nuns from the various regions for a five year period, 1994-1999. They did not have a meeting until July 1996 so that all the regions would be ready to move ahead together. Their first meeting was at Prouilhe. As we know, Sr. Mary Thomas, from the Farmington Hills monastery, was appointed to this second Commission to represent our region, and also to the third. She kept us fully and well informed of all the meetings and events. Sr. Elizabeth from our first Commission had been reappointed to the second Commission as representative for the African region, and this helped for continuity.

Sr. Joyce Rita (Karen/Nairobi, Kenya) was the representative for Africa on the third International Commission and reappointed to the current fourth one. She is also coordinator for the Union of African Monasteries formed last April which will continue to unite the region. Asia is now represented by Sr. Mary Emmanuelle (Bocaue, Philippines), and she is doing such a fine work in editing MONIALIBUS to send to all the regions for the monasteries.

Mention should be made of the initial endeavors to get the first issue of MONIALIBUS off the ground. Sr. Claire-Marie, then prioress at Langeac in France (and now at Prouilhe), and some others on the Commission in 1999, were eager to get this organ of communication started. After sending 'Number 0' issue to the Commission members and the Master of the Order, they were encouraged to go ahead by Fr. Timothy. Soon issue #1 appeared and was greatly appreciated by all the nuns. In that 2001 issue Sr. Claire interviewed Fr. Manuel Merten who had been appointed Promoter for nuns in 1999 while he was completing his second term as provincial in Germany. Sr. Claire continued as editor and printer until Sr. Emmanuelle took over in January 2004.

As we go on, some of the connections we note are an interesting part of our history. Sr. Breda, from the monastery in Drogheda, Ireland, is a member of the current Commission. We remember that Sr. Rose from the same Drogheda monastery was involved in the initial paper work for revision of our Book of Constitutions even before there were LCM Commissions set up to revise it. She served on both LCM revision Commissions and also came to the U.S. to join us in translating the approved text into English. Another connection we see is that Sr. Jean-Therese, presently on the International Commission representing France, is a member of the same community at Orbey as Sr. Elie from the first International

Commission. We met her during our first meeting which was at that monastery.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that this paper, with its focus on the beginning and the original purpose and agenda, cannot attempt to relate all the work and history of the International Commissions from 1996 to the present.

PRESENT DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION ? A CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

As we recall the purpose and work of the International Commission at its beginning, the challenge is to look to the interests of the present Commission. Earlier the monasteries had suggested many topics that could foster mutual understanding of our life among our monasteries if addressed together, such as, common life, *lectio*, study, prayer, work, and the search for ways of integrating the various elements of our life into a unified whole. Our specificity as Dominican nuns, a topic suggested by Fr. Damian Byrne, might still be an interesting topic to explore. He thought it could be study, serious reading. Whether any other contemplative communities have a chapter in their constitutions entitled "On Hearing, Studying, and Keeping the Word of God" might be interesting to consider, or so it seems to this writer. This could say something to us, consecrated, in a sense, to the ministry of the Word as Dominicans. LCM says the nuns of the Order, commissioned primarily for prayer, fulfill this as they "listen to the word, celebrate it and keep it in their hearts, and in this way proclaim the Gospel of God by the example of their life." While there is "but one and the same Spirit, one charity, one mercy," the others in the Order are "spreading abroad the word of God," and the nuns are "to seek, ponder and call upon" the Lord Jesus Christ so that the word may not return to God empty. So much we might consider.

Recalling the purpose of the Commission and the points on the original agenda brings to the fore an important question: has not the Commission taken another direction? And what is the agenda for the future? Will the Commission strive to promote mutual understanding among the monasteries? Will they promote initial and on-going formation in the various geographical regions and consider other concerns of the nuns? Will they find ways to promote a common understanding of LCM, a forum for discussion, and "an awareness of our genuine vocation and role in the Order" and a "solicitude for Dominican contemplative life..."(LCM 181)? There is a clear challenge for the nuns on the present Commission.

Sr. Mary Lucy, from the Buffalo monastery, our current representative on the Commission, gave us a fine report of their first meeting last summer at the Torrent monastery in Spain. She mentioned that their next meeting would be in April 2006 at Prouilhe, along with all the International Commissions of the Order. She said the purpose was to increase the understanding of each branch for the vocation/work of the others. Sr. Mary Lucy's closing words in her report to us seem to be an apt way to end this paper. "May this coming 800th anniversary see a deepening of our roots in the rich soil of the way of life our holy father Dominic has given us, the fruits of abundant vocations, and the rich harvest of the salvation of souls."



According to the mind of our holy Father Dominic it is fitting that the nuns, like the friars, should have an enlightened participation in their own government. This pertains not only to the government of each monastery through elections and the votes of chapter and council, but also to the compiling or changing of their own Constitutions.

This responsibility in regard to the Constitutions is to be fostered among the nuns by an awareness of their genuine vocation and special role with the Order as well as by a solicitude for Dominican contemplative life promoted according to the conditions of each age (LCM #181).

JERUSALEM

Jerusalem, Holy Mother,
Your song has been interrupted
But your voice remains
In the stillness of love.

Remembering your Wedding Day
We surround you
In whirling dance
To the tune of Miryam's drum.

We kiss your walls
And tie our hearts to you.
Only one is the prayer we make
Which night and day guards
The embers of your marriage.
We pray for your peace...

To know your joy
Is what we long for.
And we journey to your glory
Knowing we shall never rest
Until we rest in you,
Mother of us all.

Sister Mary of the Compassion, O.P.
Farmington Hills, MI

AUTHOR INDEX: 1980 – 2006

INTRODUCTORY NOTES:

1. There is an issue of *DMS* for every year **except** 1981, 1988 and 2004. Two issues appeared in 1989, one of which contains the presentations of the 1988 Assembly. Thus, in the Index, **89/Spring** refers to the issue containing these Assembly papers, plus including other articles as well, while **89/Fall** designates the regular 1989 edition of *DMS*.

2. The **1982** issue of *DMS* appeared as a supplement to the **February, 1983** issue of *Conference Communications*.

3. Articles that are translations by a nun are entered under the nun-translator, with a cross-reference from the original author to the translator.

4. Authors are entered under their present (2006) name and monastery. If a nun has translocated, her previous monastery(s) follows the present one, in italic type and reverse order of chronology. In cases of a change of name, there is a cross-reference from the previous name.

5. The entries are in alphabetical order by nun, followed by an alphabetical list of her articles, and their location, *i.e.*, **94:102-108** means that the article will be found in the **1994** issue of *DMS*, on **pages 102-108**.

6. Poetry is not included in this Index, but we hope to publish a Poetry Index in the future.

Sister Susan Early, O.P.
North Guilford, CT



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2. The **1982** issue of *DMS* appeared as a supplement to the **February, 1983** issue of *Conference Communications*.

3. Each article entry is followed by its location, *i.e.*, **94:102-108** means that the article will be found in the **1994** issue of *DMS*, on **pages 102-108**.

4. Authors are entered under their present (2006) name and monastery. (Cross references to previous religious names and monasteries are found in the 2006 Author Index.) Articles that are translations are credited with the names of both the author and the translator.

5. Poetry is not included in this Index, but we hope to publish a Poetry Index in the future.

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS TO *DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH* (2006-2007)

We encourage all who can do so to write for *Dominican Monastic Search*. The deadline for manuscripts is December 31st for the Spring issue of 2007. Appropriate subjects include scripture, theology, philosophy, spirituality, Dominican life, and the liberal arts insofar as they contribute to our Dominican vocation.

Before submission to the editors, all articles must be received by your local **contact person**. She is asked to see that they are proofread for spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc., and if the author cannot do so, to type them according to the guidelines. But she will encourage the author at all times, and pass on the article to the *DMS* editors.

Manuscripts submitted in typewriting or computer printout should be clear, single-spaced, and on one side of the paper only. Please follow as many as possible of the computer guidelines given below, even if you are using a typewriter. The editors may deem an article not suitable for this particular publication (*DMS*), but dialogue will always be cordial in any observations or changes thought necessary.

FORMAT FOR SUBMISSION ON DISK

Since *DMS* employs a uniform style, we welcome the submission of your manuscript on disk, **always accompanied by a printout**. When possible use *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th Edition). Please follow this format:

PROGRAM: Word Perfect 6,8, or 9 may be used or Microsoft Word, up to Microsoft 2000.

MARGINS, etc.: 1" top and bottom. **1.12 on left and right sides.** Full justification. Set Widow/Orphan protect ON. Use no printed page numbers; on the back of each page pencil its number.

FONT: Use the ARIAL font. Use either 11 or 12 pt. size for body copy, 10 pt. size is suitable for Endnotes.

TITLE: Position the title against the left margin, **13 PT. BOLD**. Put author's name below, in font size of body copy, using the **FLUSH RIGHT** format to secure it to that margin. Add your monastery's location beneath author's name.

SPACING: For **TITLE**, triple space between author's monastery and beginning of article. Single-space the body copy. Double-space between paragraphs and before major headings.

NOTES: Use **ENDNOTES**, Follow current academic form. L & R margins of 1.12" as above. These margins and the ARIAL font must be entered into the program's "Document Style" in order to affect the endnotes (Click: "Format/Styles/Document Style/Edit"). Any font size smaller than the article must be entered into an endnote style. (Click "Insert/Endnote Number/Options/Advanced Note"). Omit "p" or "pp" for page numbers; give only the number of the page.

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